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**SWEET PEPPER**



To ZSOFIA

AND

To ILKA

**SWEET PEPPER**  
By  
**GEOFFREY MOSS**

**CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.**  
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*The history of SWEET PEPPER is as follows :—*

Someone who mattered to me wished me to write a novel. I looked for a plot till I found one which, so far as I knew, had not been used. Its nature and the personality of Jill, its heroine, suggested light handling and a naughty, if rueful, comedy.

At first everything went as I had intended. Jill, an immature girl of the upper class, found her diplomatic employment in Vienna at an end and herself in need of money. To put off her return to London and her search for work she stole away to Budapest for a holiday. There she met unexpected and indiscreet adventures. But during these she grew up—a thing upon which I had not counted. And because of this she reacted to events in a way quite different from that which I had expected. Therefore, the Jill, who some months later fell in love, was far from ingenuë, and my treatment of her necessarily changed.

Then another influence began to bear upon my scheme. The Spirit of Romance, never very distant in Hungary, entered (without my intention) into the story and finally bolted with it. The comedy I had conceived was left far behind. The very key of my theme was altered. I had visualized a rare and individual predicament, only to find Jill faced with a problem, universal rather than particular—the problem to what extent a woman's past is her own concern.

As the climax of the story was reached I found that the minor characters faded out, whether I wished it or not; the inanimate world dimmed to a soft accompaniment, while Jill wrestled for her happiness with the Gods that she herself had made. So in the last glimpse it was as a perpetual type,

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*that she stood silhouetted against the flickering emptiness of time : a figure very different from that which in the beginning I had imagined.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*The chapter headings, read concurrently, are intended as an Olympian commentary upon the narrative.*

*I have attempted to explain the actual processes of thought by which a man falls in love, a task for which I found more experience than literary precedent.*

*There are in the book phrases over which care was taken. Any worth these may have is due to the glamour of Hungary—a setting that I found and did not create.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*I like to fancy that this Magyar background of my tale may perhaps please someone of imagination, so that he looking into a poised glass of wine may think all at once of the Hungary I have drawn, of those wide horizons, of the slow sad ploughs, of the peasant girls left watching by the river, and of Horthy's hussars as they wheel and gather, waiting for the New Crusade.*

GEOFFREY MOSS

# BOOK I

## CHAPTER I

### Jill

JILL MORDAUNT woke with a feeling of dire depression which came as her first conscious sensation. The waiter whose entry had woken her had set down her breakfast tray by her bed, drawn back the heavy pink curtains, and left the room before she opened her eyes. A pale, sad sunshine brightened part of the thick rose carpet. She shut her eyes and tried to doze, but her depression rode her too heavily. Abandoning the attempt she turned towards her breakfast. Its coarseness was absurdly out of keeping with the luxury of the big hotel bedroom and the furnishing of the tray; some slices of damp, gritty black bread, an unguessable, gluey compound which offered itself as jam and a pot of sour, straw-coloured tea. There was neither milk nor butter. Though the war had been over for more than a year food of any sort was still very scarce in Vienna.

Jill raising herself on her elbows and brushing her short hair out of her eyes with the other arm began her breakfast. For a while the depression seemed to her more general than her own. It filled the world and affected her by complete envelopment. In the bedroom it seemed to radiate from the beam of wintry sunshine that strayed across the floor and turned to a melancholy grey the black dress which lay with a heap of wispy underclothes across the arm of the *chaise longue*. Mournfulness seemed to spread from this wistful ray into every corner of the room. As she watched, it vanished suddenly, as if the sun, despairing, had given up for the day its struggle against the wintry clouds. By contrast the room had grown very dark. The discarded dress



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limply lying across the chair asserted its blackness: except in the shadows, it merged into the general gloom.

Then Jill remembered the cause of her depression. The night before when passing through the hall of the hotel she had seen a King's Messenger who had obviously just arrived in Vienna, a bulky, military figure, about which a great number of things were hanging, the unfastened belt from the loops of his dripping waterproof, an empty haversack and a leather-cased thermos bottle from his shoulder, a crooked stick from his elbow, the loose ends of a silk muffler from his throat and from his hands a number of "crossed" embassy bags; a heap of others and a suit-case lay about him.

As Jill had crossed the hall to the lift he had paused in his conversation with the reception clerk and had watched her for a polite, permissible second or two in the quiet, unselfconscious way of the middle-aged British soldier.

"Nice little thing," he had said to himself at the first glance. "Twenty or a bit more, I dare say." Then slowly and jerkily as was his habit in thought and speech, "English . . . obviously . . . and a lady."

This was more a recognition of a type, well known to him, than anything in the nature of an analysis of this particular girl. His mind had taken in the simplicity of her, the short black evening frock, its modest décolletage, its absence of ornament, though for the life of him he could not have described the dress more accurately than something dark and fluffy. To other details his mind had reacted rather than noticed, the happy assurance of her poise, the light confidence of her step which seemed still to restrain the hurry of a school-girl, the lithe ankles, the heels of her shoes neither too high nor too low.

He had known her nationality from these things as certainly as from more obvious signs; her fair hair cut short from the nape of her neck, the warm, fresh colour of her cheeks, the grey-green eyes and the glance with which she had noticed him. This had a frank, unconsidered interest with which a pleasant, country-bred

English girl of assured position could look at a man without warmth, coldness or mystery, which leaves him not a hint of what she has thought of him and gives him no more right to expect any particular line of conduct from her than if she had never seen him at all.

"Nice little thing," he had thought again. Then after a pause, "Wonder what she's doing in Vienna. . . . Daughter of some one on one of these blessed official jobs I suppose, or with a father fattening on the low valuta."

For a moment he had let his mind recall some other English girls like her in their native setting. They would be just going up to bed now, if one were in England; hanging over the bannisters and saying good-night as they went up the broad stairs to the shadowed passages above. There would be a gong hanging from the bannisters and somewhere in the hall a polished table set with decanters, jugs and glasses, and beyond an open doorway through which one could see a flicker of firelight on the walls with a hint of comfortable chairs to which one would return in a moment or two. Oh, the jolly comfort of it all! . . . and the reception clerk had just been telling him that at such a late hour he could have nothing to eat but ham and dry bread and that there was no hot water anywhere in Vienna, and of course no fires, and no bedroom, and only a sofa in a bathroom, as a favour. Those people at the High Commission, "damn them," must have forgotten to fix things up again. Lord how like 'em!

The King's Messenger had sighed, he had grown old enough for his comfort to be very important to him. Jill had reached the lift by the door of which the attendant had stood, his cap in hand and extended to arm's length in the Austrian salute.

"Pretty little thing!"

The Englishman had turned to the clerk again, ordered the only possible meal, filled in numberless registration forms and thought no more of the girl.

\* \* \* \* \*

To Jill, however, this meeting had produced very different feelings. To her the Messenger himself had been

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of no special importance, but those neatly sealed canvas bags constituted a menace to her contentment in life. In one of those embassy bags, of which the weekly advent had lately caused her so much apprehension, there would probably be an intimation that her employment with the British Military Mission was at an end. She could not hope that it would be deferred for more than a week at the most, and after that the future held no security for her.

About a month previously a notice had reached the Mission that she and other clerks doing semi-political work on the Continent would be relieved shortly by permanent members of the Foreign Office staff, and that her employment with the War Office would cease. Presumably the crisis being over, the Foreign Office could be trusted to attend to the duties of its own department.

The Messenger, whose arrival Jill had seen the previous night, had been the fourth since the arrival of this warning. She felt almost certain that one of his bags held the dreaded notification. Her depression, from being general and nebulous, concentrated and densified into this particular terror, a dull aching apprehension.

For a while she lay back watching through half-closed eyes the cut-glass bowl which hung close to the ceiling and served as a chandelier and shade for the light. She regarded it with the futile envy that many, when in distress, feel for inanimate objects. She had the frightened child's longing for some comforting, protecting arms in which to find shelter and forgetfulness. This was from instinct and not from early habit, for her fussy, capable mother had always demanded self-possession from her three daughters, even as children.

After a while Jill shivered, and then tearing herself free from her self-pity sat up and lit a cigarette before getting out of bed.

In the white-tiled bathroom which led out of the bedroom were all the extravagant luxuries of the modern hotel, but only one meagre can of hot water, permitted by the coal shortage. The effort of trying to wash in

these few cupfuls, before the vast basin had chilled them, helped her youthful good spirits to assert themselves, and by the time she had finished dressing she had quite overcome her foreboding. Indeed when she went along the wide marble passage to the stairs she hummed a tune under her breath, and having made sure that she had the corridor to herself, practised as she went a new dance step she had just learnt. Out of doors on the Opera Ring her spirits rose still more in response to the weak, wintry sunshine.

## CHAPTER II

### Getting the Sack

VIENNA has an inner suburb devoted largely to embassies. Even in its magnificent and now almost fabulous days before the war it was a cheerless if dignified district. The year after the Armistice it was a singularly depressing one. Most of the embassies seem to have been built in the architectural doldrums of the mid-nineteenth century and to mirror the style then favoured in the country to which each belonged.

The British is in the style of Grosvenor Gardens and gloomily reminiscent of a family vault of that period. They believed in family life even after death then. Many of these huge buildings had become morose from having been shut up necessarily during the years of the war. Those of the defeated nations had been deserted since the Armistice and already looked more ill-kempt than the rest. None had been painted or repaired for a decade. The Russian Embassy, with its chapel in a fanciful Moscow-Byzantine style, shockingly out of place in these ponderous surroundings, had the appearance of a derelict summer exhibition.

The ceremonious usages for which these dreary palaces had been built seem to have passed for ever. All looked grimy, resentful.

In the erstwhile embassy of His Britannic Majesty's ambassador at the court of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor of Austria and the King of Hungary, members of the various British Missions had established offices amongst the dust sheets in a state of prolonged impermanence, like the barbarians camped, after its fall, in hovels amidst the grandeurs of Rome.

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Jill worked in a large room on the ground floor. On the walls were hung maps of Central Europe, all out of date and showing the old boundaries of the lately vivisected Austro-Hungarian Empire. Below these, or pinned over them, were a few modern additions, charts of plebiscite areas looking very like trench maps or pictures of bacilli as seen through a microscope. On the roomy bookshelves lay a couple of fattened war-time Army Lists, fine menus for the war god's appetite, a book of reference or two, and some stray paper pamphlets on the use of Verrey pistols in trench warfare and like subjects. These some one at the War Office still persisted in sending to any office with an even faintly military title, perhaps to avoid the possibility of his or her removal as superfluous; an early shadow of the axe.

A typewriter stood on one of the several small tables. The others were bare and not over-clean. The whole room gave the impression of being only quarter-used. The double windows were shut, but the tall china stove failed to keep the room comfortably warm.

Jill, still wearing two jerseys and a fur stole, leaned over the vast central table, which was littered with a great quantity of unopened letters, which had just been poured out of the embassy bags. As she opened each, she looked methodically into it to see that nothing remained therein, and then dropped it into the waste-paper basket. The letters she threw, according to the subjects with which they dealt, into various trays arranged along the back of the table. Those for members of the mission, for other departments, and those marked "secret," gave her no anxiety; they could hold no alarms for her. Each other made her hold her breath till she learnt that it did not contain the message she dreaded, so much did she suffer from this uncertainty. As she opened each letter she felt as if she were awaiting the decision of Fate.

She had been brought up in sheltered surroundings, where all things were tempered, where bad times meant only fewer frocks, where, if the present had sometimes

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been tedious, the future, at least, had seemed always assured.

*But now her mother was in no position to help her. Relations would do no more. She had no one to turn to. She knew that, now that peace had come, there must be thousands of other women who were losing their war-time employment and she expected that most were probably facing the future with more bravery than herself.*

For the moment she felt immeasurably less fitted to meet life and its difficulties than those professional girls whose whole existence had very likely been one of struggle. They would at least have some definite value in the world which past engagements, wrested from competitors, had proved. They must have gained confidence from such successes and with it the self-assurance that is so often half the battle. As to herself she had received her post largely through interest.

The Mordaunts had always been a military family, and when war broke out her father had rejoined his old Yeomanry Regiment, and had been killed within a few months. His death left his widow and three daughters so badly off, that the house in Sussex had to be sold, and it had become necessary for the girls to earn their livings. Influence and these facts had found Jill a post in the M.I. Section of the War Office where she had worked under General Hawkins, an old friend of her family.

Her typing and shorthand were only reasonably good. How she wished she had taken trouble to improve them! Her French and German were moderately good: she was expert in nothing. With figures she was entirely at sea. She had had no experience except in the War Office, and she knew that the mention of that department would quite likely prove to be anything but a recommendation. England must be full of others like herself, in every way as well equipped, and these would have to scramble for the few positions left unfilled, and unwanted, by the really qualified women. Many of the best places must by now have been snatched. Of her rivals for the others, some would have more influence, most more assurance,

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some would be less scrupulous and many would be less discouraged by refusals and failures.

At the back of her mind she knew that the real profession for which she and most of her kind had been brought up before the war was that of marriage. But the husbands for the girls like herself should have come from the social class which in the war had given itself soonest to the service of the country, and which had suffered the most heavily. They should have come from the generation which had supplied the junior officers and at first, indeed, some of the rank and file. They had been mercilessly thinned.

While she had been working in London she had watched the course of this process, almost without realizing it. She had met many young men at the small dances to which she went: had grown fond of some. These dances had not been given in any spirit of fiddling to a burning Rome: the need of youth could not wait for a peace that many would never see.

Almost every partner of hers had gone over-seas, many had lost their lives and others their futures. They had disappeared from the dances and their places had been taken by others, who had necessarily come from a slightly different class. This change had been so gradual that at first it had been imperceptible. Then slowly, she and her girl friends had noticed the change in their own feelings, not so much towards individuals as towards the sex, the sex as they found it, for one can only judge sex from personal experience. Men seemed to them to have altered; then, presently what had been happening became evident.

Some of Jill's friends were less sensitive, some were driven by desperation of their own or of their parents, and married these men who had been their dance partners. In her heart Jill had despised them a little, yet in a way she had envied them their ability to adapt themselves to the changed conditions.

Jill, leaning over the huge, littered table looked at each envelope before she opened it, as some gamblers will stare



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at the back of a card before they turn it over : as if its value or suit were still undecided, and as if an effort of will or muttered prayer might change these. Perhaps *such prayers are effective, perhaps after all the thing can be done.* Anyhow it does not become religiously minded people to challenge such a view. They cannot afford to meddle with what faith in miracles remains to us.

The spectre of unemployment seemed to stand at Jill's side and watch over her shoulder each letter as she read it. The pile of unsorted and unopened letters grew steadily smaller.

In the next room the R.N.R. Officer who represented the C.I.D. (Contrôle Internationale du Danube—Oh, those war time initials !) hummed a new Viennese waltz. He walked backwards and forwards across his floor, with the shortened steps which long confinement forces on sailors and other caged animals.

"Consular" — "Private Correspondence" — "British Reparations" — "C.I.D." — "Secret" — "Military Mission" — "Diplomatic" — "Miscellaneous."

The letters fell, opened or unopened, into their baskets. Jill read through a long manuscript letter in German, asking if the writer could, on some obscure line of reasoning, claim to be a British subject and so escape payment of a certain tax.

All the while she had to restrain herself from leaving the letter to be classified and sorted into its proper basket and searching the remaining correspondence to discover if she had been reprieved for another week.

As she finished reading the persuasive effusion of the would-be Briton the door opened and the humming grew louder. The C.I.D. officer stood in the doorway leaning against the corner of it, a curved briar pipe in the corner of his mouth, his hands as usual in his trouser pockets.

"Go-mornin'," he said with a friendly nod but without opening his teeth or disturbing the poise of his pipe.

"Busy?"

Jill treated his second opening as a mark of the proper sympathy of idleness for labour and not as a question.

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"There's a basketful for you, anyhow, and I haven't sorted them all yet."

*The officer groaned out a feigned misery.*

"Looks positively like having some work to do myself!"

"Another," said Jill, "and a fat one. Looks horribly important." She threw the letter into the C.I.D. basket.

Jill waited for his comment. She rather liked his long pauses which preceded the short Scotch sentences. One waited for them so long that one had almost forgotten their bearing when they came. This habit of his reminded her of being told, when a child, that if she was angry she ought to count forty before answering. Jill had dealt with half-a-dozen more letters before he said anything else. His train of thought had altered.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Nothing important; only this one says that my time's up here in a week or two . . . and I shall be . . . out . . . of a job."

The sailor drew twice and stentoriously at his pipe.

"Mm sorry . . . really sorry," he said. He turned to the stove and devoted much attention to knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"I'm taking it better than I expected," thought Jill. "I wonder if he noticed anything; guessed at all what I am feeling about it."

She was glad for the moment that his back was towards her. Perhaps that was intentional. The Scotch were so strangely intuitive and sympathetic, though they would die rather than admit it she thought.

She opened the few remaining letters, laid two private ones for herself beside her gloves, squared her shoulders, and smiled. She must not seem a coward, whatever she felt. That had been a point of honour with her father.

The sailor finished with his pipe and tucked a basket of C.I.D. correspondence under his arm and walked with his hands still in his pockets towards his room. In the doorway he turned rather suddenly; but Jill had just time enough to compose her expression.

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"Come and eat lunch with us to-day," he said.

Jill nodded. "Thanks awfully, I'd like to."

She was glad that she had not been alone when the letter had arrived. It had not been as bad as she had feared. Still she did not want to be left to her own resources just yet. She was thankful for the invitation to lunch.

The sailor smiled :

"R-right, I'll take you in the car—one o'clock. Don't be late," he said through the crack of the door and with a boyish movement pushed it to with his shoulder.

## CHAPTER III

### . What Awaited Her at Home

THAT evening at nine o'clock Jill sat down to dinner at Sachers. This restaurant is small when compared to those at her own and some other hotels, but before the war it had a European reputation. Its very distinct character, at any rate, remains.

The hotel itself is in a most fashionable part of the town, but it is neither modern nor luxurious like others of that district. It is built with the niggardly ornateness that prevailed in the middle of the last century. It is very dingy and proud of being so, and it can well afford the luxury of being out of date. It would no more wish to follow the cult of the Ritz-Carlton than Brooks's would to imitate the Royal Automobile Club.

The dining-room held perhaps twenty-five tables. Its decorations are like those of many of the lesser Austrian castles, walls with a few panels of imitation verdure tapestry, stags' heads, and rather moulty sporting trophies.

It is like a magazine illustrator's idea of a shooting box, or a baronial "interior" at a repertory theatre. The comfortable everyday chimney-piece bears a biscuit-coloured bust of the Emperor Francis Joseph. Republicans, if they do not like it, can go outside . . . and be damned to them. That would be the view of Madame Sacher.

The room is lit from above, for it has no windows. There is nothing beautiful about the restaurant at Sacher's, but it gives, to the Austrian at any rate, a subtly intimate suggestion. Somewhere in the room there are a case or two of stuffed birds, which somehow convey the impression

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of having been killed by one's host, and being of some family and aristocratic interest.

For the matter of that there is a very real hostess, the redoubtable Madame Sacher, on whose personality, as much as on the virtues of its kitchen, the fame of the restaurant is established. If Madame approves of you, your dinner will always be a good one, whatever you can afford to pay for it. If she happens to take a dislike to you, and she is capricious, you are unlikely to find a table vacant, even though you may be one whom kings delight to honour.

Madame Sacher is not often to be seen, and her appearances are sometimes to be feared. She is quite as ready to box the ears of a too noisy young archduke as those of a clumsy waiter. Odd, how often the rule of a woman is a rule by force.

But to Madame Sacher everything is forgiven. She is a "character," almost an institution. To-day she is a remnant of the old regime. Now that the empire has vanished; now that the plaster is already peeling from the brick walls of those vast, empty palaces and the two-headed eagles above them are muffled with the red rags of the new democracy, Madame Sacher seems more permanent than most things in the once happy stucco capital of the stucco Empire.

There were eleven centuries between Charlemagne and Franz-Joseph; eleven centuries of tradition and some of the greatest names in history. Now it is all over and one supposes that we should feel proud of what has been done. But that is politics! Yet whatever one thinks about that which has been swept away, one may be thankful that Madame Sacher has survived the peace treaty. So little else has. Perhaps President Wilson had not heard of her.

Jill very seldom took meals at Sacher's, or indeed at her own hotel, for in spite of the high value of English money, she found their prices dearer than she liked to pay. Actually in Austrian currency she drew more pay each month than the Austrian Premier would have been

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entitled to for a whole year, if any minister could have held that precarious office for so long. So for economy's sake she usually fed at one of those curious little eating-houses, so cheap and characteristic of Vienna. Before the war one fed excellently in such places, heard good gipsy music, and might find a party of the nobility at a table on one side and a trio of prosperous cabmen on the other. A year after the war the cab-drivers had these restaurants to themselves. Few of the nobility could afford the luxury of feeding with them.

The quality of the meals had also changed utterly. The little decent food in the markets was bought by the big hotels, where foreigners and schiebers could afford fantastic prices. So usually Jill fed indifferently.

To-night, however, she had felt that, being so depressed, she was entitled to treat herself to a really good dinner at Sacher's. Naturally she had not wanted to dine by herself, but all her friends had some or other engagement to keep.

Since the arrival of the ill news that morning she had contrived not to be alone, so she had not had an opportunity to read the two letters from her sisters, Kitty and Janet, which had also come in "the bag." These, and a magazine lay on the table by her side.

She chose her dinner with much deliberation, partly because she wanted to make the most of her extravagance and partly because she did not want the waiter to guess how inexperienced and unaccustomed she was to order such an expensive meal.

Actually the trouble she took was wasted on him. Nothing she could have done would have impressed him. Since his first astonishment at seeing English girls, apparently quite respectable ones, dining alone, he had decided that they were so incomprehensible that he never gave their actions any further thought. Besides that, old waiters grow like old dogs, in that having to make many physical efforts they avoid unnecessary mental ones.

He noted down her order without comment or reflection, and handed her the wine list. She opened it and was

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exceedingly dismayed by the number of vintages. She had never chosen from a wine list before. In London she had not drunk wine unless she was dining with some man, who naturally attended to such things. In the *small restaurants she frequented in Vienna she drank either spritz, a ready-made mixture of white wine and soda, or else a small flask of cheap "table wine."*

She read through the list. At the top were a few French wines at prohibitive prices. Amongst these she noticed Saumur, which reminded her of her father. Whenever the day had been wet or dull he would say, "I have the feeling I may have caught a chill to-day, my dear. I think you had better give out a bottle of Saumur to Mary."

Jill would never forget the formula. She would have liked to have tasted this wine, but the cost was really too great. There followed a list of Austrian and Hungarian wines, both red and white, and after these miscellaneous others. She scanned the names to find a familiar one, but she could see none except amongst those impossibly dear French wines.

She felt her decision was overdue, that the waiter was growing suspicious of her adequacy, that innumerable eyes were watching her, that she was beginning to blush. How many things that a girl dreads at twenty a woman longs for at forty.

The self-possession that the last four years had given seemed to forsake her. She felt that she was a child at school again, and that the waiter standing by her side had become a teacher, whose impatience was only just inaudible. She turned and appealed to him.

"Which wine do you think I would like?"

He woke himself from a timeless contemplation of nothing and changed his balance without moving his feet.

"Would the Gnädiges Fräulein prefer a French, Austrian or Hungarian wine?"

"Hungarian," Jill decided, as being the kind of wine of which she might appear pardonably ignorant.

"No. 87—customers consider the best red. 92 is a

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favourite white." He spoke in the tired, flavourless tones of a guide explaining an unimportant ruin to an excursionist from whom he expects no tip. Then repenting, he asked in a voice of brighter enquiry, "*Did the Gnädiges Fräulein like Tokay?*"

Jill remembered having heard the name Tokay somewhere. Where was it? Imperial Tokay! That was it. Emperors were supposed to drink it. The words had a fairy tale ring about them. For to-night she would live magnificently. Assuredly she would drink Tokay . . . and blow the expense. She selected one haphazard and the waiter departed to give his order and to allow his mind to return to its sublime vacuosity.

Jill, freed from the difficulties of the wine-list, opened her magazine, propped it against the flower vase, and then dared to look up from the table. She always found that the erection of a book before her gave her the confidence of being entrenched against the world. It was a refuge from too inquisitive eyes, more dignified than the hasty averting of her own. It gave her an air of studious absorption, if she needed it, or a source of interest, if there was no other to be had.

She lifted her head with the happy suddenness of youth and regarded the room. There were several people whom she knew by sight, the general from the French Mission dining with three young officers, several Italians in uniform, a Belgian diplomat who bowed to her and the Swedish military attaché who looked just like an Englishman.

Along the centre of the room were tables for four or more. A few were occupied by self-interested parties, probably bourgeois. Jill suspected birthdays. Around the sombre walls were smaller tables like her own. At most of these sat men alone or in pairs, while at some were greedy, aristocratic looking old ladies, dressed in black clothes of uncertain epoch but wearing noticeable jewels. These had the indefinable air of being habituées of the place, and of sitting nightly at the same tables.

Jill felt sure that they knew each other and wondered



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why they preferred to sit apart and silent. She did not know how important a compensation the appetite for food is after the others have failed. She could not understand, as yet, that a meal may become a sacred rite; some women never do.

The men seemed to treat their meals with as much interest but with less formal reverence. Several talked to their neighbours, others read newspapers. Two at adjoining tables opposite Jill excited her curiosity. One of them, a man in the late fifties, might have been English but for the rosette of some order in the buttonhole of his dinner jacket. His hair was white and brushed back into an inhuman faultlessness, his short white moustache looked frozen; sitting straight-backed and stiff as a guardsman on parade, he sipped his red wine with an air of weary impassivity.

At the table by his side was a vulturine man, some ten years younger, wearing black day clothes and a black tie which hid his shirt and most of his collar. His dry, black hair and haggard face gave him a most melancholy appearance. He had all manner of nervous tricks; kept on wrinkling his forehead, frowning and then raising his eyebrows. When he lifted his glass it trembled alarmingly. At other times he held in his thin hands and examined with concentration what appeared to be a very large black-edged memorial card; he folded it up, laid it down, then taking it up scrutinized it, as if he had never seen it before.

Every now and then he talked to the white-haired man at his side. When he did so he spoke in a quick, eager way, his eyes blinking as he moved his lips, as if working in connection with them. His friend, when he answered, turned his head just enough to express perfect politeness, but not enough to suggest any animation. Both men appeared pluperfect examples of their very different types.

Jill tried to fancy who they might be and what they might be discussing. The older, she thought, might be some distinguished ambassador, the younger an unmarried

## What awaited Her at Home

nobleman of delicate health, permanently absorbed in the affairs of some gloomy religious sect.

The waiter bringing her first course interrupted these reflections.

When next she looked at them both men were spreading their paper napkins on the table—linen ones had not been re-introduced since the war. Cutlet bones were transferred from their plates to their napkins, wrapped in small parcels and slipped into their pockets. All this was done quite as if it was a usual procedure, very neatly by the conjectured ambassador and with much nervous fumbling by his friend.

Jill was amused. She could not guess what could be the purpose of such a trifling and rather undignified economy by men who could afford to dine at Sacher's. She did not learn till later how many of the Austrian upper class could afford only one of their accustomed meals each day, and preferred to dine in some state to eating three less palatable, if sufficient meals.

The waiter arrived with a bottle of Tokay and filled her glass with its rich gold. She tried it. As a rule she disliked all wines, except the lightest and the cheapest, but this pleased her. It seemed to taste like the warm sweetness of clover. It reminded her somehow of sunshine and long, drowsy afternoons, of the free days before she had had to work. She emptied her glass and felt very grown up.

She could see herself now reflected darkly in a far off wall-mirror. The pink net dress which she was wearing she had made herself. It was new and she was still proud and conscious of it. She was looking her best.

Then, just when the world seemed to be a place of careless happiness, she noticed the General under whom she worked. He was dining with the King's Messenger who had brought those fatal bags and with them so much trouble for herself. The sight of him broke the happy spell and depression began to rise like a mist about her.

This would never do! She must enjoy to-night and leave worries for to-morrow. Her glass had been refilled ;

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she drank its contents quickly and at once felt herself drifting deliciously upwards, leaving her cares which seemed to fade away far below her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jill picked up her still unopened letters and fingered them, undecided which to open first. One in a thin commercial envelope was from Kitty, her eldest and favourite sister, who was now typing in a city office. The other was from Janet, now secretary to a Royal Academician, who painted little and wrote much about Art, and was therefore rich. Jill acted on the child's impulse of keeping the treat for the end and started with Janet's letter.

"DARLING JILL," it ran,—

"I have such news to tell you. I am engaged to be married. Now! I haven't been secretive about it, only it has happened so quickly. His name is Stanley Pearce, and he is a captain in Uncle Dan's old regiment, and late R.A.F. I met him first down at Farnboro' two years ago when I was driving for them, and he was attached to it.

"Somehow I never thought much about him then though he tells me he admired me very much. Yet one thinks one always knows! We met again quite by chance, dancing at the Savoy, where I had gone with May Saunders and her brother. It all happened very quickly and we are to be married in a month's time. We shall have to live at Pembroke Dock where Stanley's battalion is quartered. We shall be quite poor as we shall only have his pay as a captain, but this is not so bad nowadays, and I am sure we shall be very happy.

"I was leaving my old painter man in any case. It was the easiest job in the world and I liked him all right, but I found I simply couldn't live on what he paid, and he said he was sorry but could not give any more. What pigs rich people are. He will have to get some girl who only works for pin money, I suppose.

"I shall leave here in a week's time and shall hang out

## What awaited Her at Home

with Kitty at her digs till 'der tag.' I am busy buying clothes already. Everything is wretchedly dear and Kitty has not time to make me anything, but Olive is making me two dresses, though she is not so clever as Kitty, but she has nothing to do in the day time and can work quickly.

"You have heard mother's last madness I suppose. She's sold all that she has, which does not say much—does it?—and is taking herself off to grow tomatoes in Jersey. She intends to settle there for good and expects to be a millionaire in a year or two by some new system of growing 'love apples.' Poor Mum! and she says she hopes to be able to find time to come over for the wedding. Of course nothing would persuade her to wait for it. Isn't that typical? Really each new thing she does seems madder than the last. What a lucky thing she doesn't seem to mind being poor a bit.

"Well, good-bye, darling,

"JANET."

So that was England to-day! And in Vienna Jill sat with narrowed eyes, visualizing what had really happened. So Janet had found the struggle too hard; had lacked the courage to try her fortune in the market of women with no special abilities . . . had chosen the only alternative available and was going to marry the first man who had asked her.

Jill did not suppose that this ex-Flying Corps officer was the sort of husband the family would welcome, but the family had done nothing for them and each daughter must fend for herself as best she could, and according to her lights.

Already Jill found herself defending her sister's action against the family and particularly against their Aunt Mary. Aunt Mary, who lived in South Street, who collected Lowestoft china, and gave her nieces nothing except lunch and a lecture once or twice a year.

Yet in her heart Jill felt that her sister was doing something rather cheap, a little cowardly. If Janet had fallen

## Sweet Pepper

in love, with no matter whom, she would have been for her. She had still some of the romanticism of her *fairy-tale days*.

She knew that the letter from Kitty would chiefly be an account of Janet's engagement as seen from outside. Jill was sorry for Kitty, who would take this marriage to heart, who though barely two years older than Janet and four years than herself, had always felt so responsible for her younger sisters. Kitty, who was so unselfish, so willing to go without so that the others should have a good time, who had never been young enough in spirit to understand either of them, who had always been too cautious to have been really happy herself.

Kitty's letter would state what she thought without any exaggeration and without the shirking of a point. Kitty was a dear, but dears are so often clumsy. Then Kitty was always matter of fact. She might have been an unsympathetic character if she had been harder or self-interested.

As it was, Janet and Jill, though they had never given her their daily confidences, felt that, if trouble came they could turn always to her, that she would always be on their side and would take her hand from any task to help them. Kitty was solid. Kitty was safety. Thinking of her, Jill shook her head rather suddenly and set her short, fair hair trembling about her face. Then she opened Kitty's letter.

"DEAREST LITTLE JILL,—

"You will have heard that Janet is going to marry a Captain Stanley Pearce, who is in Uncle Dan's old regiment and was in the Flying Corps during the war. He is a good young man, but frankly from our point of view—awful. He is tall and has quite a decent figure, his features aren't bad, but he has a bright red and white complexion and a black Charlie Chaplin moustache like two dirty finger marks on the middle of his upper lip. His hair is black and almost curly and his lower lip is inclined to droop.

## What awaited Her at Home

"In uniform he wears his cap on one side and a thin bamboo cane with a leather handle is his fancy. Of course he wears a silver identity disc on his wrist and a bird-cage watch on the other. So now you know.

"Before the war he was in some insurance company, so that when he speaks of the company one never knows whether he means his past or present one. I have never heard of his having any relations. I do swear to you I have tried my best to like him, I swear I have. (I suppose Janet does, she added, but had crossed it out and had attempted to make the sentence illegible.)

"Whenever I feel I am really getting on better with him he calls me a 'priceless old egg' or else something like that. I suppose I shall get used to that sort of thing and shall be able to call him Stan, and like him better. Like the war the first five years will be the worst.

"One trouble is he is terribly suspicious of any chaff and is always scenting some attempt to improve him. If one has really been trying to give him a hint about anything his resentment makes one feel such a cad, yet one has really been trying to be decent. I gave it up pretty soon. Anyhow, he is very decent to Janet and is really devoted to her. At heart he is so proud of marrying her and yet angry at the same time that there is a difference between them.

"I wish I could remember something nicer to say about him which I thought you would like. I do honestly. He really is a kind, steady young man—and now I've made it worse.

"It all came about very strangely. You know Janet never could be economical. Lately she found that she could not live on the pay her old painter gives her, and as she couldn't get a rise out of him, chucked up the job in a temper, I think. She came round to me and had tea that afternoon. She was in a wretched state. I couldn't cheer her up or do anything with her, so I rang up May Saunders, who was going dancing somewhere that night, and begged her to take Janet along with her.

"Next afternoon I saw Janet and she mentioned

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Captain Stanley Pearce for the first time and in a week the thing was fixed up.

"Mum is too absorbed in the new tomato-growing scheme to take interest in anything else. I went to talk to her about Janet, but her thoughts were wandering all the time. When I told her that Janet would live at Pembroke Dock all she said was, 'It'll be cold there in winter. She must try wearing woollen wristlets. I read about them in the *Exchange and Mart*. They said that if the wrist were warm. . . . etc. . . .' So I gave it up.

"She has taken a small farm in Jersey and left for it last Monday, taking a whole library on tomato culture and all the parquets. Cousin Reggie, who has something to do with stores, has promised to make them buy all she sends to England.

"I have no news of myself. I found time to make two dresses for Daphne Druce, who pays me quite well. But now it is dark before I get away from the office, so I shan't be able to do much in the way of making things for Janet.

"The manager of the office has been paying court to me again and has been very tiresome. The other day he kept me on some excuse after every one else had left and then tried to kiss me. I said, 'No nonsense, Mr. Johns, please,' which worked surprisingly well. He collapsed entirely, but next day he was snarly and beastly to me.

"London is frightfully expensive. Beatrice Holden and I talk of starting a small flat together in Chelsea, but we can only afford two rooms and she wants to share a bedroom so as to have a sitting-room. Personally I'd sooner do anything than share a bedroom, so I don't know if it will come to anything.

"I hope you are well and happy. If you want to give Janet a present give her something *useful*, a tray or a kettle or something like that. Mother and I have got the Aunts to give them linen, spoons, forks, etc.

"All love, darling,

"Your own

"KITTY."

## What awaited Her at Home

Jill had finished dinner and sat leaning back in her chair watching the smoke of her cigarette.

Poor Janet ! Poor Kitty ! Poor girls like them who had to earn their living. Poor Janet, who had lost her nerve and was buying security at the cost of such a marriage ; who must suffer till her perceptions became blunted, not so much by her husband whom some glamour might surround, but by his friends till she grew to think of them as " practically gentlemen," " almost gentlemen."

Poor Kitty, who had always been so absurdly proud and who must writhe under the attentions of that manager of her office, yet who went on working there because she might not find any other employment.

Jill tried to forget that nasty story but her imagination kept constructing the scene of it. A middle-aged manager, probably with a Jew strain in him, with loose lips, and hair growing thin and an animal nose. He would ask Kitty to stay after work was over, and she, expecting overtime, would be pleased. Kitty, who was naturally indolent, kept herself so in hand because she was trying to put by money. The other girls would pass out of the swing doors and down the clattering stairs. Perhaps they would guess why Kitty had been asked to stay behind and so would titter amongst themselves.

Poor Kitty who could never take life lightly ; to whom everything mattered so much, who could endure everything but who could not laugh at its trivial annoyances. In Jill's version of the scene the curtain fell on Kitty walking home through the rainy, lamp-lit streets, asking herself all the while whether she had not herself been partly to blame, the damp beginning to soak through her cheap shoes.

\* \* \* \*

So that was work in London ! What she had to look forward to ! The actual work was nothing. It would be the conditions of life, the shoddiness of it when she was out of work, the lack of freedom when she was not, that she would hate.

She would have very little time for social life of any sort.



## *Sweet Pepper*

Friends would grow to forget her ; invitations to dances would become scarcer and scarcer and with them would vanish the chance of meeting some man she could marry, her one chance of release.

Yet the certainty of any employment would be so welcome to her, what she dreaded most was not to be able to find it.

She wasn't frightened of work, but she wanted to enjoy her youth, wanted it so desperately.

In her mind she argued rebelliously against Fate. If only she might have had three years more of pleasant life, surely then she would not mind so much. Surely one could not have the same hunger for enjoyment and the good things of life after one was twenty-five. Two years . . . one year, even for a year she would barter the rest of her life. . . . Six months ! Mixed inseparably with this was the child's desire to put off the evil hour.

If she might even have a month to get used to the idea of her future that would be something ; just to be able to put off the day of her departure for England ; a month's freedom from care, a month's holiday.

It would be only right that she should have a holiday. She had worked for the last four and a half years with never more than a few days' rest, and since the Armistice she had been working in Vienna, still under her old chief. She had money enough to be able to afford a holiday, she deserved one, owed it to herself.

## CHAPTER IV

### Letting Chance Decide

JILL drew at her cigarette. It was no longer alight. Looking to catch the waiter's eye, she saw her General and the King's Messenger coming down the restaurant towards her. She smiled at the General, who stopped at her table. He nodded twice to her.

"Wella', young woman, havin' er . . . er . . . good time?" He had known one of her aunts and always spoke to her rather as if she were a child. "Er . . . celebratin' your coming departure . . . eh!"

Jill had a sudden fear that she was going to cry, a thing she had not done for years. Her eyelids flickered and she bit her lip.

"No, General, I don't want to go at all. Surely you know that."

"No? No? Not wan'ter go! No!" He nodded several times with a serious expression, as if weighing this new idea. Then, "So you . . . er . . . don't wan'ter go. Wella, I know I'll be . . . er . . . jolly sorry . . . er . . ."

Jill had worked with General Hawkins for so long that she knew his processes of thought. She could follow in his expression the change of his idea. His figure was lean and angular, his face weather-beaten. He had kindly eyes, a hawk nose, a thin, tight smile and an imperceptible, boyish moustache.

His whole aspect was that of those hard-bitten hunting squires who seem, judging by the portraiture of the period, to have typified the late eighteenth century. Indeed, he was very eighteenth century in many ways.

Beyond his work he lived for nothing but horses, that he

## Sweet Pepper

rode indifferently. His nature was very simple, very kind and essentially English. He had none of the northern hardness or western quickness of those other races of our islands. He thought slowly and often aloud. One could almost watch the growth of an idea in his brain. Yet this habit of revealing each step in his reasoning, which should have made him transparent, caused him to be to the Latin races a grim enigma.

He carried his head high which gave a false impression of haughtiness, and when listening to anything at all difficult to understand he screwed up his eyes and nodded to each sentence as if weighing it appreciatively: then at the end, very disappointingly, he would say, half-apologetically, "That's a bit beyond me, ye know," or "You've got me there."

Such modesty was genuine enough, but it made him a diplomatic riddle of the first magnitude to members of the Foreign Missions. The French general, now sitting at the end of the room, who refused by habit simple explanations for anything, never believed a word that he said and suspected him of Machiavellian guile.

"But ye don't know Major Goslin', do ye?" he was saying. "Forgot! Goose, this is Miss Mordaunt, my secretary." He introduced the other soldier.

"May we sit down? Shan't bore ye, shall we? No? . . . Sure? . . . Splendid! . . . Jove!"

"Do please." Jill was delighted to have some one to distract her thoughts.

"If you really want to know, General," she began, "I have been so sad all day about going that I've had to treat myself to dinner here. I've drunk more than half a bottle of wine to myself. Look!" She lifted the bottle.

General Hawkins pursed his lips on one side and regarded it comically. At such times he had somewhat the air of a kind, elderly parrot.

"Wella, wella, Tokay! . . . Tokay. To be sure! . . . Dash me! What made ye choose Tokay? It's a dessert wine really, like port and sherry and all that."

"Oh, dear," laughed Jill. "I'm glad I didn't know

## Letting Chance Decide

earlier or I would have died of shame of what the waiter must have thought. I don't know anything about wine, you see, and the name sounded splendid, so I chose it, *and I like it.*" She had no self-consciousness or false pride with, friends only with waiters and strangers. The two soldiers laughed.

Her moods changed quickly. She had become radiant, like a schoolgirl on the first day of holidays. What an old dear General Hawkins was, so kind and so dense. When in repose her mouth often gave a suggestion of sadness, now it was parted in pleasure : her colour and the life in her eyes had increased with her animation.

The French general at the other end of the room nudged the officer on his right.

"*Regardez moi ça.* He will grow jealous, the General 'Awkeen. See the other Englishman talks to the secretary with how much impressment ? But he is marvellous, that 'Awkeen. No one regarding him would ever divine that he ever saw that little one except in his office. He hides everything from the world. *Quelle fine mouche !*"

It was an old joke in the British Mission that the French could never believe that the two English girls were not secretly something more than secretaries in their leisure hours. Even the English could hardly be so inhuman !

"It is not a classical beauty. *C'est une petite frimousse,*" said the younger French officer. "She lacks features, she has a nose too retroussé, *trop gamin* for my taste. I prefer riper charmers, like the women of Syria. But I find altogether seductive her hair, here ashes and there sand. Also the eyes please me much, a riddle of colour. Are they really green or merely grey ? The green I prefer. Green eyes indicate a temperament truly mercurial. One never can be sure of which colour they are.

"There was a woman at Salonica like that : but at Salonica also a crisis renewed itself each day, and unhappily I allowed myself to be seduced by my work, so that in the end I left before I had had time to solve the problem of the green eyes. *Mais que voulez-vous ?* It is necessary

## Sweet Pepper

that one makes sacrifices for one's country. *C'est la guerre!*" he nodded wistfully.

"Has she temperament, do you think, my General?" he resumed after a pause. "Has she ever loved?"

"How should one know with the English? One can never tell! An English white goose perhaps, but she suffices enough the Awkeen. One supposes that they are not all equally phlegmatic, even the English. Why do they powder only their noses? They are too pink."

He was evidently not much interested in Jill and returned at once to the subject of his English colleague.

"But that Awkeen, he is marvellous. One might watch him when he is with her, and watch, and watch, but one would never guess! What a type! What cunning, what a fox, but he cannot deceive me. *Le malin*, I have marked him." He blew as if to cool his fingers.

General Hawkins smoked and listened approvingly to Jill and Major Gosling. She had moments, when he could see the likeness to her Aunt Clare. What a stunner she'd been! Jove—yes—what an amazingly pretty woman! She could dance too. Why it must be twenty years ago—dash it. To think of it! He nodded appreciatively at the remembrance.

"So you're going home soon?" asked Major Gosling.

Jill nodded. She did not want to talk of that.

"Have you liked Vienna?"

"Yes, ever so much. I've loved my time here," she said.

"Then you ought to manage to see Budapest for a day or two before you go home. You could get there in a day by boat, or a few hours by train, but the trip down the Danube is worth while. Oh, you'd like Budapest. That really is a gay city. Vienna was once, but now . . . Anyhow half they said, even before the war, about Vienna was fable; about Budapest it was true. Even now one can get as good a meal there as anywhere else in the world; better even than in Paris, I think. And the hotels are wonderful, right on the Danube, views, air and sunshine and that kind of thing. Really not a place to miss. You

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should run down there for a fortnight's holiday before you go home. You mayn't be in these parts again."

To Jill it was a delicate torture to be advised to put off the day of her departure to London.

"Then you really think I ought to? I ought to go and see it?" This in a doubtful tone. She felt that if he were emphatic enough . . . would be quite right to . . . anyhow to think it over. It was true that she would not get the chance again, probably. One ought to try and see the world!

Now Budapest was one of Major Gosling's mild enthusiasms. About it, a certain kind of cigars, a certain chalk stream in Hampshire and a little village on the Riviera he would speak with a confidential earnestness which he had kept since his credulous adolescence, when all gilt had been gold. Now he exhibited the Hungarian capital like a pet, stroked it, catalogued its virtues, praised it beyond Paris.

The French General at the end of the room screwed his eyeglass into place under a magnificently defiant brow, and his eyes twinkled knowingly.

"Look now at the Englishmen. The attack of the new one upon the secretary marches. '*Il gaze.*' But the General 'Awkeen sits with the head back and smiles. The mouth does not widen itself even a little. It shows only the upper teeth. It resembles a horse."

The French captain returned to the subject he had been discussing.

"I know, my General, but I must refuse to see the influence of Italy in the taste and the architecture of Vienna except in as far as the Italian was a weak prototype of the Louis Quatorze. There are motives and a spirit common to the two, but beyond that."

His General broke in again.

"Look now! I study him always! Already I know many of his masks, that of simpleness, of thinking of nothing, that pretence of thinking slowly and almost in words like a peasant telling you how many grandchildren he has. I see behind that too. Our Italian colleague does not understand him as I do. It is a complete study. I

## Sweet Pepper

*know well by now that the brain of the Awkeen functions like the electricity. It is necessary always to reckon with him. He has always his nose to the wind. But yes, he is a power, our Awkeen. One goes here, one goes there. Everywhere he blocks the way. To-day one re-makes Europe. One makes history and everywhere the influence of the Awkeen manifests itself."*

Jill did not listen to all that Major Gosling said. She was trying to work out in her mind how long her savings would last if she went to Budapest and stayed at a good hotel. How much could she afford to spend on such a holiday.

Major Gosling was tapping the table with his forefinger.

"You see my point?" he said.

"Perfectly," said Jill, wondering how much conversation in the world is never listened to.

"Tell me," she asked, "how much a day could I stay at a decent hotel in Budapest for—all in?"

"In our money? Let me think. "Um . . . um . . . Yes, I suppose you could stay at the Ritz quite easily for ten shillings a day or fifteen shillings at the outside, or *en prince* for one pound a day. It is nothing, absolutely nothing." He rambled on with advice as to the selection of a room and the best method of tipping waiters.

Jill was fascinated by the plan which was being formed for her. But, despite the eulogies of Major Gosling, it was not the charms of the Hungarian capital that led her on, but the longing for a holiday, time free of all worry, before she had to return to England.

She regarded the gay label on the wine bottle. "Shall I?" she kept saying to herself. "Budapest" was the printed answer on the label. She turned to General Hawkins.

"Do you think I could get a visé for Hungary?" she asked him.

"Hungary?" he repeated. "Er . . . visé for Hungary? . . . er . . . visé? Ah! Don't see why you shouldn't," and after a pause and some reassuring nods,

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"I'll see to it, if ye wan'ter go. I'll . . . er . . . put it through. That's all right."

"I'll tell you what," said Major Gosling. "I shall be back here with 'bags' in a week's time and I think I shall manage to take something on to Pest. I'm only an old dug-out, you know, not a King's Messenger really, and I'm chucking up this running about job, but I'd like to go to Pest for a night or so at H.M.'s expense before I go home. I have a friend there who always puts me up. If you will wait, say till Tuesday week, I'll take you down with me if 'Enery permits." (General Hawkins was always called 'Enery.) "You'll trust me with your secretary? Eh? Why I must be old enough to . . . but, lor bless us, even you must be getting on yourself, 'Enery."

The General nodded. "I . . . er . . . trust ye? But . . . er . . . why . . . er, of course, Goose." Then confidentially to Jill: "If you want a travelling maid you go with old Goose. He'll see to everything, a regular old maid himself; always carries hot drinks and sandwiches, and rugs and pillows and devil knows what—sor'ter white knight business. Blessed panttechnicon! You go with him, that's if you really wan'ter go." More nods and some blinking. "I'll fix the visé for you."

Jill saw the two men who had interested her at the beginning of dinner rise from the tables opposite. She was amused to see the bulge made by the cutlet bone in the pocket of the putative ambassador's jacket.

"Excuse me," said General Hawkins. "That tall feller is Count Erdhardt. I must speak to him about his horses. He talks of sellin' all his stables, poor feller! Nothing left! Damn sad, ye know. Can't help feelin' . . ." He got up and shook hands with the strange pair.

Jill turned to Major Gosling. "Really I think I must be going. It is so late."

"Well, let's all go down to Pest, anyway. I'm staying at the Bristol too. I've only got a bathroom of course. I'll walk you home if you'll let me." They got up from the table.

At the end of the room the French General had once



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more become interested. He was saying to his staff officer behind the back of his thin hand, "Look at our 'Awkeen now. He talks to Count Erdhardt. What does that signify? What is he fabricating? The Count is Austrian, but his wife, who is dead, was Italian. There is something beneath the cards. One cannot watch too carefully. He does nothing without a purpose. Nothing! We shall see! It becomes interesting. Without doubt he is feeling his way towards the Italian camp. But how deviously, how subtly! What a master of duplicity! We shall see!"

Major Gosling helped Jill into her cloak. General Hawkins joined them and they walked down the room. Jill was still uncertain whether she could compromise with her conscience and take the proposed holiday to Budapest.

It would mean spending her savings. It would lessen her ability to face a spell of unemployment in England. Should she?

In the hall they passed Count Erdhardt. He was trying to light his cigar from a match his nervous friend held in an unsteady hand.

Should she?

The cigar was alight. The Count and his friend were shaking hands and bidding each other good-bye.

Should she?

"Let it be Budapest," said the Count, with a wealth of meaning just as if in answer to her question.

His melancholy friend nodded with twitching eyebrows.

"Yes, we shall meet in Budapest," he said.

For Jill the decision had been made. Later, if things went wrong, she would be able to point to this coincident for justification. It is easy to be persuaded to do what one wants.

## CHAPTER V

### Playing Truant

**I**T is difficult, if one plays truant, to avoid a sense of shame as one steals away. The empty hall reproaches, the familiar flowers watch sadly as one crosses the garden, the hedgerow and the street question and restrain. Neither by land nor sea is it possible to part quickly enough from the scenes that held us. One has no ally in Nature. The inanimate world is in dull conspiracy against the flight. It is only by considerable effort of will that the thing is possible at all.

Jill was playing truant from the necessity of returning at once to England and looking for work, yet she was able to leave Vienna without any sensation except that of adventure.

By accident she had chosen, perhaps, the only way of escape in which the forces of Nature urge on and aid the fugitive.

The steamer heaved and strained at the ropes as if eager to carry her on her journey. The Danube surged and rolled under her, and once free of the quay, swept her along on her journey before the paddles had begun their work. The landing stage, the tall church and the suburb slid away. Soon the last straggling houses and the last river-side beer garden had slipped past.

For a while Jill sat alone at the end of the upper deck with nothing before her but the wide expanse of the river. The only sound was the splash of parted waters about the keen bows. She could scarcely feel the tremor of the engines.

Vienna and the rule of the West were left behind, ahead spread the vast marsh lands, forests of willows that grew

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high as elm trees about her old home. The Danube rolled through them, deserted, immense and primeval. The air was still and frosty. Before her, the sun had risen and hung red and improbable above the tree-tops.

*Jill felt strangely free. The river seemed to bear her quickly away on her truce. She felt free in a way she had never known before. The confining streets, the boundaries, the narrow valleys and the never distant barrier of hills, that protect yet limit the West, were all behind. Vienna, though so Western, is at the end of the West.*

Out of the haze a heron flapped lazily across the river. Jill turned and walked aft to follow his flight. The last chimney of the city had sunk below the forest skyline. The wild had closed behind her. She watched the wake creaming astern and wondered at the ceaseless attraction and variety of running water. She thought of her sisters in foggy London; of Janet dressing hurriedly in a dark, chilly, little bedroom; of Kitty on her way to work. It would probably be drizzling in London. The pavements would be greasy. The buses would be full and their windows frosted with the breath of the passengers: Kitty would have to peep through the door into each one that stopped. The main thoroughfares would be wet and sordid. A soft hopelessness would lurk in each deserted side street. The cheap discomforts of such a life! The winter in London did not bear remembrance.

She turned in thought to the farm under the South Downs where her childhood had been spent and wondered who lived there now. There would be a cheerful fire in the dining-room, and a family sitting down to breakfast, a crisp, white English table-cloth, and crisp English toast and a still folded newspaper on the table. Jill grew hungry at the thought.

Outside the mist would be steaming under the old apple trees in the orchard: there would be frosty cobwebs on the rose bushes. It would be thicker along the river meadows, but eastward, above the mist, one would catch sight of the Downs shimmering in hazy sunlight.

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How small and civilized England seemed; how incredibly far away. She fancied the space that separated her from it, the thousands of tame, industrious villages, the damp, heavy fields, the chilly, leafless woods. Yet the few miles of Danubian forest between her and Vienna seemed to have barred the way behind her more than any mere distance. To her it seemed that there could be no return now. The sensation was surprisingly definite, though there was nothing to prevent her from going back by the next boat.

She turned and went below for breakfast. There were very few other passengers in the saloon. Most of these had finished and the air was already thick with tobacco smoke. A waiter showed her to a table at which only two people were sitting, a well-dressed woman of about forty with a brightly-lined fur coat, slipped off her shoulders, and a chubby bald-headed young man in the khaki uniform of the United States Y.M.C.A.

Both were obviously American. They were talking, he in the broadest Yankee, about some matter of relief work.

Jill had given her order in German to the waiter and had begun to study the people at the other tables when the American woman turned her head lazily, her chin resting on her hand, and spoke:

"You British?"

Jill answered without warmth. She was feeling elated by the freshness of the morning and was irked by the prospect of insistent platitudes in staccato American. She had had enough American in Vienna to last her a little, and she wanted to break from the accustomed ways of her life.

"My, I'm just cheered to meet you," pursued the voice with indomitable amiability. "I'm right tired of listening to Mr. Paint. Dear, this is Mr. Paint of Dry Crossing, Kansas, leader of res-cue work in this section of U-ropean starvation area. He can't think of a thing outside of dry goods distribution."

Jill bowed with reserve in answer to the inevitable

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"Pleased to meet you" from Mr. Paint, and lowered her eyes, hoping for a respite. But the woman overwhelmed her with a torrent of facts, questions and quite shameless flatteries.

Jill's breakfast arrived and was eaten, but the spate of words did not fail the American. Her name was Mrs. Glory Heathcote. She was the organizer of a section of relief work in Serbia and had been in Vienna for a week : was going to take a ten days' holiday in Budapest on her way back to Belgrade. She was widowed, definitely or partially : appeared to be rich, or anyhow indifferent to her expenditure.

She was just crazy about anything that was young, or had Jill's eyes : wondered how Jill fixed her hair to curl the cute way it did : had had a gay time in Vienna, "bobbing around with a bunch of boys." She just doted on Alt Wien and was crazy to have a peep at Budapest, where Mr. Paint had left his auto (not a "tin Lizzie," but a real speedster with a throat cough to it), in which they would presently motor to Belgrade. She called Mr. Paint, in spite of his apparent youth, Poppa Paint, "as being suitable to his sedateness," she said : and besides, it made their unavoidable travelling together seem more proper.

She scarcely took time for breath, and even then did so in audible gasps to prevent the possibility of interruption. In contrast to these energetic utterances, her face and manner were contemplative and even lackadaisical.

Her hand under her chin bore the weight of her head, her fine shoulders drooped, her disengaged hand lay plump and listless on the cloth. She watched Jill through lazy eyelids, with eyebrows raised, which gave her an air of rather weary amusement. It had in it the germ of a wink. Her mouth suggested recent dissipation.

All the while Mr. Paint smiled with the corners of his lips and rolled a countless supply of cigarettes, putting them afterwards into a tin box. Every now and again

## Playing Truant

he looked up and regarded Mrs. Heathcote with the eyes of a doting spaniel.

Jill drew off her coat and listened to praise of her jersey. She had to explain how she had knitted it herself, how long it had taken her, and presently found herself, without having intended to do so, revealing her name, and having facts about herself drawn from her. Reserve seemed impossible, almost an affectation in this forcing-house atmosphere of intimacy, and before the gusts of confidence of the American woman.

Mrs. Heathcote's baptismal name had been something quite else. Jill heard it and forgot it, for Glory seemed to suit her better. She had the rather generous beauty of some matronly classic goddess tempered with the inconsequence of the new world, and latterly, perhaps, a trifle debauched by the old. It appeared that, as a child, she had been called by her real Christian name till some old nigger . . . her family were from the South . . . Why do all Americans one meets claim Southern blood? . . . seeing her shock of fiery hair, the first time had exclaimed "Glory"! and had so christened her. Her hair under the influence of time and treatment had obviously changed somewhat since then, *sic transit!*

Jill did not at all wish to reveal to strangers the events and motives which had started her on her journey, but she soon realized that she could only avoid doing so by leaving the table. She had not enough adroitness nor enough moral courage to avoid answering questions. In any case it would not have been easy to snub Mrs. Heathcote. There had never been a recorded instance where such an attempt had succeeded.

Jill longed to make an excuse and to rise from her chair, yet she did not do so. Glory Heathcote's method of extracting confidences was new to her. She would pretend to believe something entirely untrue and so force denials and the truth, pocketing the trophy without troubling to examine it.

After a while Mr. Paint moved away to write at another table and Jill, giving up the fight, confessed the facts of

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her financial position and her determination to enjoy herself for a few improvident weeks, before settling down to the drudgery of earning her living. Yet, if she were willing to explain, her words refused to convey what she wished to express. They took on themselves wrong interpretations. Her story seemed to show her as weak-hearted, and shirking what other girls faced without comment. She felt that in reality she was starting upon *a rather brave adventure. But the phrases which should have represented this eluded her. She found herself defending rather than explaining what she was doing, and subconsciously appealing against unfavourable comment.*

"I expect you think me very silly," she ended.

"Look here, kid. I guess you're just the wisest, wonderfulest little girl that ever happened." When she spoke, by imperceptible changes of expression the American woman's face lost its indolence and became vivid. She nodded her head ever so slightly, her chin in the palm of her hand. "Just the wonderfulest little girl I ever met," she added.

Jill was surprised how grateful she felt for this support. She believed that, when she had made up her mind in Sacher's restaurant, she had done with doubts and that she was indifferent to comment. She had resented the other's curiosity. The realization of how glad she was of this approval made her feel very like a child whose head has been patted . . . and she had thought she was so grown up!

Perhaps this idea reacted on the American and stirred some long dormant maternal instinct in her, for she stretched out a hand and laid it on Jill's wrist. It was warmer and kinder than Jill would have expected.

"See here, honey, I figure out that you're right all through. It's better to buy glad rags to-day than to save up for brass handles on your coffin. You may be drowned at sea and not need one. Never put by for to-morrow what you can spend to-day. Not know that one? That was in *The Ladies' Home Journal* years back.

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Do you think I'd have this fur coat on me, if I'd waited till I could afford it? You spend what you've got, that's the surest way to get more.

"Chapel books tell you that millionaires made their first start by saving. More likely they missed a train and took an auto which they couldn't afford, and impressed the boss of their business so much that he gave them a rise without their asking for it. When father dies is it the school-book boy that gets remembered in his will? Not a chance! You keep your eye on the prodigal son! He'll just wander round with his troupe of performing hogs and scoop the lot.

"Now there's another thing. Say, don't you call me Mrs. Heathcote. My name's Glory . . . Glory! . . . Glory! When they ask me to make blots on the hotel register or some such, I just write Glory like a British peer. In the Vienna hotel the room clerk said to me, 'Glory? Glory what? . . .' 'Just Glory, young man, and if any one wants to be silly about it, just send them along to me.' So don't you start stretching that nice hopeful little mouth of yours getting out any more Mrs. Heathcotes."

She rambled off into a story of what a British Passport Control Officer had thought of her refusal to admit to a surname. The episode had ended in a complete victory and a dinner *à deux*. "And he began by trying to look stern at me. But why, in half an hour I had him making paper darts out of blue envelopes for me to throw out of the window. Oh, he was some hopeful boy. I might have got quite fond of him, but why . . .!"

Jill listening, wondered how General Hawkins would have dealt with her. She feared that he would not have fared much better than the Passport Officer. He and Glory seemed to represent the distilled essence of their races and classes. Glory, like so many things, would have been "a bit beyond" him.

Next she discovered that Jill knew no one in Budapest and that they were going to the same hotel.

"Kid, guess I'll do the little mother and adopt you



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while I'm there. We'll have an auto to buzz about in and Poppa Paint to get busy if we want anything. That right?"

Jill knew that she had not strength enough to refuse and was not sure whether she wished to do so or not. In a way she would be glad of the company, and the facilities which this arrangement would give, yet they would rob her visit of almost all its element of adventure and uncertainty. She had not visualized it like this and it would be, perhaps, the only chance in her life of something unexpected and unusual happening to her. She might never be able to afford another.

Everything would be easier, probably pleasanter, and yet she felt she was being cheated of she knew not what. Things were not turning out as she expected. Perhaps in real life they never did. She sighed.

The American noticed this and pondering for a while began, "Jill, kid, you don't mind me calling you Jill? Why I can't waste time on a door-step knocking. I walk right in and christen name every one, or else stop out. You mopish? Cheer up, now do! One?" She offered a small case from which Jill took a cigarette. Its end was tipped with rose-coloured straw and "Glory" was written on it in gold manuscript.

"These'll do you good. There's dope in them. You never smoked one of these before. They were made in Egypt specially for the German Crown Prince. We got acquainted in Venice some years back, and as I liked Little Willie's smokes, he gave orders to the cigarette people that they could make them for me too. Poor Little Willie! I do think he tried, but he'd bad blood in him. No one liked him. Anyhow I don't suppose he gets these cigarettes now. Won't he just hate not being in regimentals. He was a sorry sight when he had anything else on."

Her bag still lay open on the table. She produced a small leather book from it.

"Kid, just sign your name in my birthday book and a five-word opinion of men. You'll find mine in June 9:

## Playing Truant

'damn bad, but nothing better.' You set down what you think of them, while I pack your case." She began to fill Jill's half empty cigarette box. In it she found a snap-shot of Jill and Kitty in bathing dresses.

"Say, Jill, don't you look a peach, and what a dandy beach suit. This for me?"

The photograph was annexed. Jill felt helpless to deal with such spontaneous good nature. Overpowered she rose from her chair.

"It is very stuffy in here. I think I'll go on deck for a little."

To her relief the American did not move.

"Bye-bye, till presently," she said. "I'm not hunting for a draught myself. Guess you'll find me here at lunch."

## CHAPTER VI

### The Gentle Art of Slaying Dragons

**W**HEN Jill reached the upper deck she found that the sunshine had become warm and the mists of the morning had vanished.

On either side forests of giant willows shut in the view. Beneath the trees grew impenetrable undergrowth. There were no signs of houses, traces of landings, nor of boats. In a few places the shores were protected by loose stone-work but otherwise they looked as if they had remained untouched since the beginning of the world. Sometimes a wooded island stretched, slender and attenuated down the stream: sometimes a maze of lesser channels broke away into the deep woods, and cutting off a bend in the river, rushed tempestuously into it again.

It seemed to Jill that here Nature was still supreme. The river ruled his country and man had made little mark upon it: the wildness had not yet been conquered. These forests gave her an unaccountable impression of cruelty. In their depths anything might happen, she thought, anything might lurk. She remembered how, as a child, woods had always frightened her. Just as hills had seemed lonely and valleys safe, so woods had seemed definitely hostile.

On deck there was only one other passenger, a young man with a tall fur cap and a rough sheep-skin jacket slung over his shoulders whistling an air Jill had often heard played by the *tziganes* in Viennese restaurants. He walked backwards and forwards like a sentry, always turning before reaching Jill, and showing no particular interest in her. His face was sun-burnt and pleasant, and

## The Gentle Art of Slaying Dragons

he appeared to be absorbed in agreeable thoughts, for sometimes he smiled.

Jill wondered what his position in life might be. His breeches and boots were rough and his short jacket, which had loops and frogs instead of buttons, was a peasant garment, but he held himself well and his eyes looked quick and intelligent. His step was assured, it had nothing of the countryman's shuffle. A vague air of aristocracy clung to him. He was probably some sergeant of the old Imperial Cavalry, she thought. That would account for him.

Jill walked aft and watched the wake of the steamer racing along the banks and breaking on the shallows. Just below her the Hungarian flag, red, white and green, fluttered in the sunlight, its heraldic shield and jewelled crown flaunting the old tradition. How brave it looked, she thought, after the rags of grimy red and white, that hung untended from the flag poles of democratic Vienna. The whole ship, too, was clean and polished as a Dutch kitchen. How different from anything in Austria to-day.

She turned away and looked for a seat. Benches ran round the rail, but these were still wet with the dew: so she chose a large crate or bale that stood on the deck, covered by a tarpaulin, and sat down on it.

A few yards away from her the young man in the peasant coat continued to walk backwards and forwards. As he passed her he looked very directly at her. His glance was challenging, and, in an indefinable way, seemed grimly humorous. It was neither curious nor insolent. He did not look at her again, and except when his back was turned she averted her glance from him, yet attention seemed oddly to centre on him. It was as if he filled the leading part in some play the beginning of which she had missed.

The two men on the bridge had become for her only animate parts of the background—the crowd. This impression was strong as it was inexplicable, like that which is sometimes felt when one enters a room and finds two people, one looking out of the window, the other

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perhaps watching the clock. There may be nothing suspicious in their attitudes and no reason for supposing that anything unusual has occurred, yet one is certain that something vital and dramatic has been interrupted by one's entrance.

The young man paid no apparent heed to her, but she felt that he remained interested in her actions; that, in some way she could not understand, she had become very important to him by having stepped, unknowingly, on the same stage.

Jill found herself waiting for the something which did not happen. What she expected she had, of course, no idea. She was certain that the young man would not make any attempt to strike up an acquaintance. His interest did not seem to be of that sort.

The sunshine was warm, but a cold breeze flickered over the deck and chilled her ankles. She drew them up under her and made herself comfortable.

The steamer had left Vienna soon after dawn, and the night before some friends had given her a farewell dinner. As a result she was feeling physically tired. Her sense of anticipation waned imperceptibly. It must have been groundless. She began to feel drowsy, the beat of the paddles was soothing: she closed her eyes.

Just when her thoughts had become indistinct she was roused into sudden attention.

Three sharp knocks had sounded inside the box on which she was resting. She sat up stiff and alert. There was no possibility of mistake. She had not only heard them, she had felt them. They had been as clear and distinct as the table raps at a spiritualistic séance.

Then slowly something alive began to stir in the box. She felt it raise itself a little, turn over and sink down ponderously again. She recognized each movement as easily as if she had seen it. She could guess the bulk and weight of the thing. Then all was still again. She looked round.

The young man walked the deck, his back was towards her. He had noticed nothing. To Jill, he had lost all

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the importance her fancy had given him. Interest which had faded out had become suddenly intense again, but centred not on him, but on whatever it was that was hidden inside the box beneath her.

Perhaps it was some wild animal, she thought. One could imagine some black, cat-like beast making just such noises as it turned over in its cage ; more likely it was only some domestic creature, a pig on its way to market ; something prosaic.

She rose to her feet and regarded the box. The tarpaulin which covered it was made fast by cord laced through eyelet holes. By pulling at this, she was able to draw up the canvas cover at one corner and to see the side of the box itself.

It was solid, but holes the size of a penny piece had been bored in it at intervals. Through one of these she could see something dark and leathery. It seemed oddly familiar, but she could see so little of it that she did not grasp what it was. Dry mud was caked on it. It might have been the hide of some large animal. It moved slightly. Then, suddenly she realized that it was the upper part of a man's boot, and as she did so her wrist was seized ; she was twisted round and thrust with steady violence into a sitting position on the box.

The young man in the sheep-skin coat was bending over her, his features set in an expression of extreme menace. His fingers bit into her wrist, but his other hand was still invisible under his slung jacket.

Jill braced herself but did not struggle.

"How dare you ! Let go my wrist," she said in English, forgetting in the stress of the moment to speak in the German she knew.

The man's fingers opened and he drew back, his boot grating over the deck. His expression relaxed and became in an instant bland and polite. He bowed, the arm with which he had held her stiffening formally at his side, as if he were being introduced to her in some drawing-room.

"Pardon," he said, in what might have been French. "I did not know that you were English. I thought you

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were Austrian from Vienna, or worse—Tscheekh,” he continued, speaking Jill’s own language, but pronouncing each syllable carefully, like a child at lessons.

Jill shifted her poise and moved nearer to the edge of the box, so as to assert her freedom to rise, if she wished to do so. The man drew back a trifle in acceptance of this.

“What do you mean by interfering with me?” she demanded uncompromisingly, straightening her deranged coat.

“I am ver-ry, ver-ry sorry,” he said. “I will relate to you how ver-ry, ver-ry sorry I am. Believe me I did not try to insult you. The box you sat on has very private things in it. I did not want any one to regard it. It is ver-ry, ver-ry important, what I make. It is honourable, it is quite noble, I promise. You will believe I did not know you were English. I am ver-ry, ver-ry sorry. It is true. Honest Injun!”

He assumed an expression of comic gloom.

“I am so sad to have done a rudeness. Relate me that you forgive me,” he added.

Jill was a little mollified but was in no mood to show it.

“You must be very frightened of people seeing what it is in that box of yours or you wouldn’t run at them and attack them like that.”

“It is quite honourable I promise you,” the man repeated. He was not at all at ease in English and used uncommon words, but Jill knew from his accent that he must have learnt it from people of the upper class, and in England. He had the air of a man of a ruling caste, yet now he was dressed just like a peasant. Even if she had not known of the man hiding in the box, his disguise would have been suspicious enough. He was silent, but she could tell from his puzzled look and a slight movement of his lips that he was framing some new sentence. He smiled boyishly, as if to ingratiate himself before venturing further.

“You must forgive that I speak so bad English. It will be better as I speak more. I ought to speak it well,

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for I was two times in England, but I am not good at languages. If I do not make myself understood I talk French or, of course, German. Would you like that I do that ? ”

“ I can understand what you say,” Jill answered with some accentuation of the final word.

“ I have had so little use to speak English that during the last six year I scarcely speak it at all. But one talks of the box. It is secret that is in the box. Secrets are tiresome and not noble, but they are necessary sometimes. I can only tell you that, but it is not my secret alone. If I promise you that it is honourable, will you please not ask what it is. It is ver-ry difficult for me to say more. It is a fix, you understand.”

“ But it's no use beating about the bush,” Jill said. “ I know there is a man hiding in it. I heard him move and I saw his boot. I suppose he is escaping from the police. Has he done something dreadful ; and why are you helping him ? ”

The man did not seem to have heard at once. He pursed his lips and regarded the sky for a moment or two, then his shoulders moved in the smallest shrug. It was the first gesture he had made ; it suggested polite resignation to the idea of being at her mercy in this matter.

“ Ver-ry well,” he said. “ Because you have seen him it is no good to say there is not in the box a man. You have found out. It was a secret, most important, and not mine only. I thought you would not find out, but like most men I am wrong. I was silly to think I could prevent a lady from finding out anything. One man perhaps tells a secret to a lady, another, like me, does not. It is all the same . . . she will know. I could never deceive them. I am too simple. My nurse was the first. She found me out and beat me. She was a Slovak peasant girl and ver-ry strong ; I do not forget. When I had holidays later I smoked my father's cigars and the Miss, who taught my sister English, she found me out. Since then all the ladies find me out. I ought to have known when I saw one on deck that it was not good



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to have a secret. But ladies do just make one mistake. They think because they know a little they know everything. You think that the man travels in the box so that he escape from justice. To the contrary. He travels like that so that he will not escape it. I pay for him. It costs him nothing, his ticket. Yet he is not content. Can you believe such ingratitude?"

What Jill could not believe was that any one in an official position could be conveying a lawful prisoner in such an extraordinary manner. Obviously the whole thing was illegal and furtive.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" she said. "I do not suppose you have any right to take the man against his will. What has he done?"

The man did not answer for a long time, but stood scrutinizing her so intently that she began to feel awkward.

"I think I could trust you," he said at length. "But promise that you will not interfere if I tell you. Do you promise so?"

"How can I know what I shall do, till you tell me?" Jill answered. She knew that she had every advantage in this contest. It was the man who had something to fear. The argument was in her own language, which put him at a disadvantage. She was rather sorry for him, for his school-boy English rather pleased her, and relenting a little, she said, "Perhaps I shan't give your secret away. That is if I think you are in the right."

This talk of secrets reminded her of one of the queer pleasures of her childhood. A family of three girls had provided just the conditions to encourage secrets. The remembrance, by contrast, made her feel very grown up.

Fancy finding oneself at the mercy of this bit of a girl, the man was thinking to himself, and after all the difficulties he had surmounted. He supposed he would have to tell her everything and throw himself on her mercy. It seemed the only way out. He was amused by his helplessness. Thank heavens it was not a man he had to deal with. It was so much easier to explain, even a matter

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like this, to a girl. Life consisted of explaining away things to a woman. The same old element of sex !

He smiled grimly at this admission. It was rather ridiculous. Anyhow it prevented him from feeling heroic : that was something, he thought. When one is carrying out single-handed a desperate exploit, one so easily begins to feel heroic. And that is horrible, like the Latins.

" Good," he said. " I will tell you about my friend in the box. Do you know what a Bolshevik is ? " Then in an impressive tone : " He is a Bolshevik . . . think ! Think of that ! "

" What ! Is he a Russian ? " Jill asked. So perhaps the young man himself was Russian. That might account for his tall fur cap and his curious coat.

" Russian ? Of course not. Hungarian, though of course he and his friends are in league with the Russian Bolsheviks. Six months ago we had a Soviet Government, you know. This man made some of the worst murders in Budapest. Now I take him home so that one will try him. It is good, is it not ? It is good, the fair play ? You will promise not to interfere and tell to any one ? You English are not with the Bolsheviks. Your Captain Freeman, a sailor, saved so many from the Bolsheviks though he was alone to many thousands. When there was blood in the streets each night. Blood ! A most brave man."

He had said this with deliberate intention, to create an impression which would influence her, and Jill felt a tremor of excitement.

So she had been right in her premonition about the young man in the sheep-skin coat. He was engaged in some dramatic and strange affairs. What an adventure, to find herself sitting on the box, in which a kidnapped Bolshevik murderer was being smuggled across a frontier ! What a contrast to breakfasting with those matter-of-fact Americans ! They seemed to belong to a world now remote and artificial ; where one wound clocks, and where everything was governed by time-tables, a world

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of well-regulated machines and bank balances. This was more like the Old Testament. It was good that they were not on deck; they would have spoilt everything. And by thinking of this, she realized how much she was enjoying the situation.

"Do tell me more about it," she asked, leaning forward. She had forgotten that she had determined to be grown up and to maintain a distant manner. *It was this atmosphere of secrets that had done it!*

"Is it that you promise to help me? That is, will you not say anything?" he asked. He did not wish to admit how anxious he was now, even to himself. It would be too bad if this fair-haired English Miss, perched on the box, should ruin the work of these desperate weeks.

"I think so. I can't promise quite. Go on telling me about him."

Yes, her face was pretty, as soon as it was animated, he thought. But what did that matter!

"But it is a thing very long to explain," he said. "If you want, I will make explanation. To make politics the Austrians fête our Bolshevik criminals and do not allow the ext . . . ra . . . How do you say it?"

"Extradition," Jill supplied.

"They do not allow the extradition of the Bolsheviki who made our Revolution and so many crimes. We say this and this man is a murderer."

Anyhow he could gain time by talking. And that was better than nothing. He might win her round, or something might happen.

"Is he a Bolshevik? they ask in Vienna. When we say 'Yes,' they say, 'Then he made politics: politics are not a crime. His murders were politics.' So they do not give him up. In England you do not understand the Bolshevism. You let people talk or think it. With you it is safe to do so, but when it is war you do anything; you are then just like other peoples. In emergency one must act not to talk. The Bolshevism is worse than war. It is no good to talk. To act! To act quickly!

"So, some one has to take the Bolsheviki, that have

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fashion to be plump then. How did women manage to be short or tall according to the mode, or is it that . . ." his thoughts rambled on. His philosophy was of too volatile a sort for him to be able to concentrate long.

"If you are very good and do not interfere, then I will tell you as soon as we have crossed the frontier."

He is talking to me like a child, as if I were a baby, Jill thought. This will never do.

"But by then you may not be here," she said. "I may have told the customs people to look at this silly old box of yours."

She watched him to see the effect of this half threat. She did not intend to carry it out. Her mind was already made up, though she would like to be persuaded further.

The result of her experiment was certainly surprising. The man's expression and voice changed in an instant. His mouth set firmly, his brown eyes seemed to grow suddenly black; he bent forward and blotted out the sky. The dilettante carelessness with which he had been speaking about himself, of life and death, as if disdaining any warmth of manner, vanished. His voice became harsh and urgent.

"If you make that you make a most wicked thing." His English had deteriorated and was scarcely intelligible. "This dirty Jew, this filth. . . ." He kicked the box viciously. "He killed many . . . many . . . many, poor and rich. Loyal officers who fought and were wounded, cripples and lame. He drag them from hospitals and kill them, most men of no family that made no influence. The aristocracy he had not enough of courage to touch. The rat!

"One poor officer, ill of wounds, I had known; he had been sergaut of my squadron in my first year of service. He makes tortures on him. So he dies. He is so, this Bolshevik, this dirty thing." The man gave another angry kick at the box.

Jill had been so overwhelmed by this outpour. How savage he could be! When he was like this his violence frightened her, though it thrilled her a little. The veneer

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fashion to be plump then. How did women manage to be short or tall according to the mode, or is it that . . .” his thoughts rambled on. His philosophy was of too volatile a sort for him to be able to concentrate long.

“If you are very good and do not interfere, then I will tell you as soon as we have crossed the frontier.”

He is talking to me like a child, as if I were a baby, Jill thought. This will never do.

“But by then you may not be here,” she said. “I may have told the customs people to look at this silly old box of yours.”

She watched him to see the effect of this half threat. She did not intend to carry it out. Her mind was already made up, though she would like to be persuaded further.

The result of her experiment was certainly surprising. The man’s expression and voice changed in an instant. His mouth set firmly, his brown eyes seemed to grow suddenly black; he bent forward and blotted out the sky. The dilettante carelessness with which he had been speaking about himself, of life and death, as if disdaining any warmth of manner, vanished. His voice became harsh and urgent.

“If you make that you make a most wicked thing.” His English had deteriorated and was scarcely intelligible. “This dirty Jew, this filth. . . .” He kicked the box viciously. “He killed many . . . many . . . many, poor and rich. Loyal officers who fought and were wounded, cripples and lame. He drag them from hospitals and kill them, most men of no family that made no influence. The aristocracy he had not enough of courage to touch. The rat!

“One poor officer, ill of wounds, I had known; he had been sergeant of my squadron in my first year of service. He makes tortures on him. So he dies. He is so, this Bolshevik, this dirty thing.” The man gave another angry kick at the box.

Jill had been so overwhelmed by this outpour. How savage he could be! When he was like this his violence frightened her, though it thrilled her a little. The veneer

## The Gentle Art of Slaying Dragons

of centuries peeled off. Other men she had met seemed as tame as curates by comparison; yet his voice could be ingratiatingly gentle.

When she had felt the jar, as he kicked the box under her, she had struggled to her feet. Inside the box she had heard convulsive movements. She had visualized an unshaven ruffian trembling with fear.

The kick, or perhaps the thought of having hurt Jill, cured the man's anger.

"I . . . I . . . I am ver-ry sorry, I grow so angry. Forgive me! I have much shame of it, but I feel very furiously. You are not Hungarian. You cannot understand. If you did tell the *douane* they would make this beast go free, but I will shoot him first. That would be an end of the Bolshevik, so you would make him no good. As for me. . . . It does not matter what happens to me."

Quickly as his thoughts had changed, the passion had gone from his face. He was smiling almost self-depreciatingly again.

"I am not important," he went on. "If the Austrian take me, it is nothing. Last night he wounded me with a browning. I bled like the pig, but it is not too bad, nothing. He was in hell of a funk, the dirty beast. But I am not angry with him because he shoot. I take the risk. Without it . . . it would be dull work, no sport. That he is brought to Hungary and tried, for what he made, that is important. You will not help him? I trust it to you. He might have killed me last night. That was his chance. I had only my hands, for I use never arms except in extremity. Now I have him. You do not interfere, do you? By my friends, they will make good justice with him. It will be a fair deal. If it were not, I would make as much to make him free as I have made to take him. Fair play, even to pigs!"

The man's manner had become easy again. He was slowly and carefully choosing his words. He might have been discussing some tea-cup topic. To Jill it sounded like some tale of the Mafia in the bad old times. The idea of carrying a man, hidden in a box, to a land where some

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stark justice waited for him, seemed absurd against the background of a luxurious river liner. If it had been less grim it would have been comic-operative.

She felt that she had left behind the matter-of-fact West and crossed into some make-believe country, such as flickers in a cinema world. This man with his tall fur cap set jauntily, his wounded arm, and slung coat might have been some film-land Prince in disguise.

In ordinary life one does not have to consider the ethics of poetic justice. Conduct is guided by law and custom. But here amidst fantastic surroundings the old codes did not seem applicable. The young man was so engagingly reckless, in turns so imperious and so dependent upon her, that instinctively she sided with him. If she had seen more than the upper of a dirty boot pity might have been engendered; but as it was, the prisoner in the box remained to her an unclean, cowardly myth, stage property rather than humanity. Besides, she was actually enjoying the adventure.

The man by her side was waiting for her to speak. He was growing anxious again, she noticed.

"I give you my promise," she said.

"Mam'selle, how do I thank you enough? My card is in my pocket, but I cannot . . . Arkozi, Count Tibor Arkozi. If ever I can make anything for you, I am your servant, always."

"Oh, it is nothing," Jill said. Effusion frightened her. "My name is Jill Mordaunt."

"I hope that I do not hurt you when I hold your wrist?" he asked.

"It is all right. It only startled me," she answered.

"It startle more the poor devil that I kick his box."

What kind eyes he had, Jill thought. One could never believe he could be so fierce. He must be very dangerous. He looked so strong, and a good dancer, she fancied, but he was not tall enough for her standard of what a man should be.

"Now you must tell me about the vow you spoke of," she said in her most self-assured manner.

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"There is not time sufficient now," he answered. "That is Pressburg . . . Poszony in Hungarian, where there may be a trouble with the *douane*. You can see the castle already."

He pointed ahead to where an empty ruin crowned a hill. Two passengers had appeared on the upper deck carrying packages.

"We stop by Pressburg one hour perhaps," he said. "Then there is one more town where the ship stops before it is Hungary. It is good that you do not talk with me more till after Pressburg. It will be safer alone."

He began to look anxiously around. His manner had become preoccupied, almost abrupt. He was obviously trying to appear the peasant. He asked her what the time was as if to justify their conversation.

She told him it was nearly eleven.

"At five of the afternoon we stop at the first landing in Hungary. If you will be up here half an hour before I will relate to you whatever you like of me. If it goes well with the Customs," he laughed. "Au revoir."

A town had swung into view, old and picturesque enough, as Jill saw it from the river ; but it was civilized. The spell of the forest had gone ; the Hungarian at her side was uneasy and wanted her away. She was to miss the possible excitement. The glamour of adventure lessened. She was disappointed.

"As you wish," she said, and moved to the companion-way. On the first step she looked over her shoulder. He was only a few paces away. His lips were set. He looked tired and rather desperate, she thought, gazing intently at the pier ahead.

"Well, till then . . . and good luck," she said, and ran down the stairs.



## CHAPTER VII

### The White Vow

**I**T was in the late afternoon when Jill returned to the upper deck. The sun was poised on the forest skyline: in another moment it would drop behind it. Astern the river glowed in fiery peacefulness, till the ship's wake spread its swallow tail of kaleidoscopic ripples.

The Count Arkozi, with his back turned to her, stood leaning against an awning stanchion, watching the sunset. His cap was in his hand. Bareheaded, he looked still younger, Jill thought. The red light increased the hot tints in his brown hair and glinted on the worn surfaces of his leather jacket, slung over his shoulders. His silhouette against the radiance appeared resolute and perhaps melancholy. It did not touch the modern world.

Jill joined him, and resting her elbow on the rail, waited by his side in silence. She was uncertain, even, whether he knew of her presence.

When the rim of the sun had sunk below the tree tops, she spoke.

"That was very wonderful."

For a time he did not answer.

"This is the land of my people," he began presently, "and the sunsets are more sad in Hungary than in all the other lands, more sad and more beautiful. You will find it so."

Then, after a pause, he continued: "The evenings in our country are always sad and ver-ry long. It is the hour altogether Hungarian. We are a people from the East. Always we have followed the sunset, till in this plain we come, and here we stay. We do not wish to follow further to the West. We are between the West and the East.

## The White Vow

It is enough. Yet we cannot be altogether happy when it is sunset. We want something that we shall never perhaps reach : we know that we do not reach, yet we do not know what it is, that we want. At heart we are ver-ry with the gipsy, a people who roam ; yet we have been in this land a thousand years now ; a long, long time, and yet still we are like gipsies in it, gipsies and fighters."

For some time he was silent again. Jill did not know what she could say. Then he continued :

"Everywhere the Treaty has put Hungarians under the yoke again, under the barbarians, not under those that beat us in war, but slave peoples, Tschekhs, Roumans. That has been our fate : always to suffer. Do you hear that music ? "

The strains of *tzigane* music from below just reached them, the softer passages scarcely audible. The endless repetition of its refrain somehow seemed to suggest the endlessness of this vast plain, its wild freedoms, the melancholy of its loneliness ; a lament that was not a complaint.

"That song was made three hundred years ago, when Hungary was under the Turks. Then for centuries we fought and saved Europe from the Turks. We suffered, we struggled, no one helped us. Everywhere you profit. In an end we made ourselves free again . . . after most had died. We shall make ourselves free again. But there is much misery now. We shall not see it. Perhaps our children not. Yet in an end it must be. But to-day we are very sad."

Jill had nothing to say to this. All the English in official positions in Central Europe regretted what the Treaty had done, but she had grown used to lamentations in Vienna. Motto—avoid loosing wars, she thought to herself when she first heard these complaints. Then she would think of the beginning of that same war at home : the scamper to the village post-office for news, the flags in the cottage windows, the posters on the barn. She would remember the early elation, so long passed that one could scarcely conceive it any longer. These had not

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been the emotions of the war. They had been part of the old happy time, its end and, one supposes, its final justification. For these other nations the beginning must have been the same, but the end. . . .

"I know," she said. . . . "It is very sad." Then after a long pause, "You were not troubled by the Customs people after all?"

"No. These new nations have made new manners," he answered. "I relate to the Captain of the steamer that I have something contraband in a big box. What shall I make so that it is not opened, I ask him. He gives me good advice; so I fasten a note of a thousand crowns on the top of the box with a pin. When the steamer is by the landing, I stand and watch . . . with my pistol ready, just in case. The *douanes* come to my box. They see the note. It goes into the pocket. They spit, and they go away. They ask no questions. They are some great nations that you have made!"

He looked at Jill and laughed so infectiously that she laughed too. How quickly his moods changed, she thought. He was obviously much relieved to have passed the final difficulty. Now he looked tired, in spite of his high spirits.

"I am glad," she said. "Do you think your friend in the box knows that he is almost in Hungary?"

"Oh, I hope!" he answered. "He can hear the music of the *tziganes* in the ship. Each tune is more well done than the other. The *tzigane* is always happy when he arrives to his own land. They are always so, our *tziganes*. When they are happy, they play well. Now they play a tune so sad, to remember the sadness of their country. Afterwards they are again gay and more gay, that one does not end in despair."

He caught the tune that swelled gustily from below, and hummed with it. It seemed to Jill a dazzling rollick of fiddle strings.

"You promised to tell me how you caught your Bolshevik and about your vow," she said. "I forgot! How horrid of me! I never asked if your wound hurt you

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much. This morning it was so unexpected, that it seemed only natural and part of it all, that you should have your arm in a sling. I did not think about it till I was downstairs. Does it hurt now ? ”

“ No, thank you much,” he answered. “ It made an ache all morning, but it is good again. If you want I will relate you about the vow, if you promise never to say of it at all. That is so ? ”

Jill nodded.

“ It is very difficult,” he began, “ to know where I should make to begin. You have heard of the army of Szeged ? No ? At the end of the war I fight on the Italian front. Old postmen could watch Roumanians. It is not bad, but it is a land of rocks. One cannot get under the ground from the shells. The rocks break to pieces when a shell hits them. The pieces go ver-ry far. There was ver-ry little water and ver-ry little food. It is not so good as a Roumans’ front, where one could hunt all day, but it is not too bad : much better than against the Russians or the Serbs, who are soldiers.

“ Then comes the Revolution and an end of the war. One sends orders that the soldiers are to come home. Others say that they are to go to their homes at once. Many go away. Some stay. There is said to be peace. The Italians do not understand. It is not their fault. But many soldiers are killed, believing there is peace. No more food arrives. There is nothing to eat ; no trains ; the roads are too full. Then we hear worse and worse of the Revolution. We try to go to our homes. The Russian Bolsheviki make propaganda everywhere. The peasant, who are good men, are afraid and will not sell their corn. Then these who make the revolution find it goes too far. Karolyi runs away to Prague, others run away to Switzerland.

“ Things are made worse and again worse. There is no staff ; no posts ; no trains. The old government and all the affairs are to the hands of the Bolsheviki.

“ Then one desires to make a counter-revolution, but it is not easy. The Bolsheviki have all the stores ; all the

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*railways and the telegraphs. They have made a Red Army of those who would have starved otherwise and out of Jews and Russians.*

"The Tschekh come against them : but the Tschekh always run away, and the Bolsheviki did not have to fire shots.

"Then one hears that one goes to make a counter-revolution at Szeged, and perhaps in Transylvania. I go to Szeged.

"We make an army. Each gentleman brings his peasants. He pays them, if he can. They find arms, but there is no ammunition, or very little.

"It is very strange there at Szeged. It is only a little town. So many come there, noblemen on foot dressed as peasants, walking three weeks ; some alone, some with their peasants behind them ; a few sons of Hungarian noblemen from the schools at Vienna who run away. Two boys are wounded by Serbs, but in an end they arrive to Szeged. It is very good, that !

"Then some peasants come and presently we make an army. There are few clothes, and scarcely any cartridges, and not much food. It is ver-ry, ver-ry cold, ice half a metre thick, no coal and ver-ry little wood.

"Then we choose a leader. We choose Horthy, the admiral who made such brave news by the Navy. He is a ver-ry strong man, but not ambitious. He does not want to be chief. He cares nothing but for his country. In an end one persuades him.

"There came each day people from Budapest and from other towns. They tell what awful things the Bolsheviki make. How the Bolshevik Jews kill loyal officers, how they torture some, how they treat the ladies ; that it is like Lenin and the Russians. One hears the Government is so bad that there is scarcely any food in Pest. To the aristocracy one gives nothing.

"We want to go against them, but there is a big French army by us. They say one must not ; they make politics ; they promise us cartridges. Nothing happens. We are

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not strong enough to go unless the French allow. We are very few, and have no stores, so we wait.

"Once I go to a castle of a friend of me for a party. We dance twenty hours. It is too cold to sit still, because one gives all the coal to the army. After two days I come back to Szeged, and go where I sleep in a small hotel. It is terribly cold. In a little room, that was of a housemaid, I find many of us. There is a stove in it and enough coal to make hot so small a room, when it is very full of people.

"There is no light in the room except of the stove, so I can see only the faces of my friends that are red with the fire. There is fifteen, perhaps more. Some sit on the floor by the stove, others on chairs, on the bed. In a corner there is the housemaid. She has no stockings, so she sits with a soldier's coat round her legs.

"There is there too, an actress, who is prima donna at the Szeged theatre where one makes operatics: for there is no other amusement.

"This actress sits near the stove. She wears a long coat-like blanket, colour of violets, and coral beads round her neck. I remember ver-ry well! She is a good friend by us all, and very loyal to Hungary, though she is born Italian of Fiume. She has the good looks of the kind of the Venetian.

"She is talking when I come in. Every one excites themselves. I ask what one makes. Every one relates to me. There is much noise. In an end I hear. A gentleman has just arrived from Budapest. The Bolsheviks had had him in prison and beaten him, but in the night he pretended to be very ill and then crawled away. He related what things the Bolsheviks make.

"There were two ladies of society in Pest, young girls who we all know well. We had danced with them many times. They were very pretty. The brother had come to Szeged to join our army, but the father was ill and very old and the girls stayed with him.

"I notice then the brother himself is in the room. He sits on the floor near the stove. He is by the chair of

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the actress and she has the arm round his shoulders. He has fingers in front of his face. That is why I did not see him when I came in.

"The Bolsheviki in Pest had not allowed to his sisters that they buy food for the father. They got only beans and sometimes a cabbage; and he is weaker and again weaker. The daughters go each day to beg the Bolsheviki, that they may buy food. They give jewels and the Bolsheviki promise milk and meat; but it does not go.

"In the end the Bolsheviki become angry, when the girls come often to ask what they had promised them. 'Do not come again,' they say; but next day the father is worse. The girls go in the evening to beg for food, but the Bolsheviki take them and put them in prison. They outrage them and in the morning they beat them and turn them out.

"The girls go home and the father is dead. One tries to poison, but she is only very ill. They escape to Vienna. They walked all the way.

"That is what my friends had just heard. Remember we all knew these girls. The brother is in the room by us.

"The man who brought the news told us the names of the Bolsheviki who had made these things. There were eight—except one—all Jews. One is of a society of workers from Debreczen, he is head of the prison where they make these things.

"Then Lola, the actress, began to talk and to cry. She is a very good girl, and excites herself terribly, for she is Italian. She stayed, because she is good, at Szeged to cheer us; though she could have been paid much more money if she had gone away.

"She said that such things should not go without justice and vengeance; that we should make of ourselves, in the room, a society; and we should swear to make justice on all the Bolsheviki and most on the eight men who had made these things.

"Yes, Lola, she is a ver-ry good girl. I see her sing in Pest three weeks ago, just as if there had never been a war or a revolution.

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"She said, if the Bolsheviki make so with her, it would have been bad but not so bad, for she was no longer virtuous, but with ladies like these it was terrible. Girls of the society, you must understand.

"Then she put one finger against the stove, so that it touch the hot iron and she kept it so. She had a coral necklace between her teeth and bit it, so that she could bear the pain. I remember ver-ry well. Her face white, by her dress, colour of violets: in the room nearly dark and full of faces.

"Did you see ever a gipsy who relates the future by looking at a ball of glass? She was so.

"'I swear that I will make vengeance,' she said.

"When she take away her hand the skin is black and burnt. Then she say each of us to do the same and swear. I have the mark of it. See!"

He held out his right hand.

The light had faded out of the high sky; there remained only the red glow on the western horizon. The darker colours had merged into the coming night, and the paler shades stood out strangely distinct, as after rain. By the failing light Jill was just able to see that the skin was shiny over one knuckle of his hand.

He began speaking in tired tones, which often cover emotions stronger than one cares to show.

"How many there were in the room I do not remember, but afterwards twenty of us made this society, like a club. We would not have any more. Now there are twelve of us. One was killed fighting against the Reds, one wounded and died, three are married and we have made them free of their vow, four have disappeared in other countries to where they went to bring back Bolsheviki, as I have done.

"But see! Here is where the steamer makes the stop. It is Hungary, too faithful Hungary, almost all that is left of our thousand-year-old kingdom. In two minutes we are arrive, then in a few hours you are by Budapest. It is here I go to the land. It would not be good to go to Pest, for the Government, if they know, must stop me.



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It cannot allow that we make these things. But here it is a small place; one will not know."

Ahead Jill could make out a pontoon moored near the bank, some huts, and further away a few dark houses, tall and sombre in the dusk. Here and there a light gleamed in a window.

"But the eight Bolsheviks whom you swore vengeance on. What has become of them? Have they been caught?" she asked.

"We have taken six," he answered. "One in Budapest, one in a vault, four we have found in other countries and brought home. The other two we cannot find. One thinks they have gone to the Bolsheviks and Russia. Two gentlemen of my friends went to find them, but one was killed. Later more of us will try; but in Russia it is very difficult."

He spoke hurriedly. The steamer had commenced to slow down. The surface of the river ahead trembled; the reflections on the water shuddered and broke. The ripples caught the glittering of the stars and played with them.

"Is this one of the eight Bolsheviks?" she asked.

"He is the most bad. The director of the prison where they made these things. Three weeks in Vienna I hunt for him. By pretending I, too, am Bolshevik, I got trail of him. I follow like the game. In an end I stalk him. I make acquaintance of him. I talk Bolshevik propaganda. Bolsheviks are so dirty beasts, they cannot trust the one the other.

"In an end I find his weakness. He drinks. I go to dirty wine shops, but he will not drink alone. I have drunk bottles of bad spirit, most horrid. One night my chance comes. I persuade him to my lodging. I have English whisky I tell him. But he brings with him a friend, an Austrian Bolshevik.

"All is ready. There is the box to put him in, like a rabbit. There is the cart and the horse, which wait. He grows drunk, and I, too, have drunk much. We are at the table. I stand up and take the Bolshevik by the

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collar of their dresses. To the Austrian I say, 'Sit still and I make you no harm, if you do not I kill you.'

"He is not so drunk as I think. They both fight and the Austrian makes himself free. He runs to the window to call out. I leave go this and hit the Austrian. He is not wounded, but he lies down . . . as when one is asleep. When I turn to my friend he is at the door trying to open. He points his browning. I have no browning. The browning is not a noble weapon. I bend myself to run at him. He fires two times and it hits me in the arm.

"After, he is in his box with his hands tied and linen in his mouth: but I bleed like the pig, so I fear I cannot make what I had wished. I do not dare to drive to the frontier where all is ready. So I make to the ship and pay much to the Austrian *douane* that they do not look at the box. But we arrive!"

The steamer hung on the stream and then surged against the bank. Two men in peasant's clothes boarded her at once and ran to the box. They picked it up and carrying it along the gangway to the shore, shouldered it into a waiting cart.

"Voilà! It is safe." The Count gave a sigh of relief. "But I am tired," he added. "I go to shore. I wish you good-bye. Perhaps I may meet you in Pest: perhaps I come to try for another Bolshevik. I have taken two. I would like three. You have my card. To the address a letter will find me. If ever I can serve you relate it to me. I will make whatever you wish."

He bent over her hand and hurried across the gang plank to the shore.

For a moment or two she saw him, clear against the dark, apple-tinted sky. He looked over his shoulder and raised his hand in a salute.

The high boots, the jacket slung loose, his wounded arm, and his tall fur cap gave him the silhouette of some old-time officer of Hussars.

For a moment he stood, still and memorable, against the evening light. Then he was gone, but for a long while Jill stood watching the gloom, where mysterious

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shadows moved against the background of the forest ;  
so that at last the trees themselves seemed to stir and to  
have joined in some stealthy game of hide-and-seek.

*She turned towards the companion-way. So this was  
Hungary ! What an introduction !*

## CHAPTER VIII

### Feminine Touches

**I**N her bedroom at the Ritz Hotel, Budapest, Glory Heathcote lay on a *chaise longue*, fully dressed but with a fur coat tucked round her knees.

Out of doors it was freezing, but warm sunlight poured through the French window and across her couch.

She lay quite still, resting and listening to the voices and the tread of the invisible crowds, strolling below on the promenade, which ran between the hotel and the river. The roadway and the embankment were hidden from her, but she could see, just below her, the Danube, a wide stretch of green water darkened here and there by gusts of wind to a chilly blue. Across the river the ornamental quays, the numerous black barges with their white deck-houses and dazzling Sunday flags were visible. Beyond, a line of rambling houses, and at their backs the cliff rose in terraced gardens to the Imperial Palace. The Palace itself, with its interminable colonnades, its mansard roofs and its vast central dome crowned as much of the hill as she could see. It stood out in shadowed sharpness against the pale, honey-coloured sky.

Glory lay propped up with pillows, her hands hanging limply over either arm of the couch, her eyes half closed and her lips parted, the corners of them drooping and giving her an expression of world-weariness. Relaxed and immobile, her mouth was almost coarse. She might have been only just moved from bed after a long illness, so listless was she.

Presently she looked languidly at her wrist-watch. It was time for lunch. She let her hand fall loosely into her lap, and for a minute or two more abandoned herself to

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pure thoughtlessness. This was a side of herself which she never allowed any one to see, a side that, like her cheek bones, grew yearly more assertive.

She sighed, stiffened her lips, sat up and reached for the telephone.

After a while she heard Mr. Paint's voice answering her call. She composed her face into an expression of eagerness, much as an actress might while passing through the wings to the stage.

"Hul-lo, Poppa Paint. Hurrah! . . . Glory speaking. . . . Yes, yes, Glory. . . . Yes, yes. Been for a walk? Bully! . . . That for a wonder! I've just sat and sat. My! . . . That so? But see here, Poppa, me for lunch. Yes, yes. All right. Outside my door two minutes. Punctual? Sure! Bye!"

Laying down the instrument, Glory rested her head in her hand for a minute and then got up from the sofa. She ran a comb through her orange side curls, licked a forefinger and smoothed out her eyebrows, reddened her lips, pursed and reddened them again, changed her slippers for high-heeled shoes, gave her finger nails a rather slovenly polishing, threw a skunk stole round her shoulders with more care than her nails had received, looked at herself in the glass, made a grimace at the reflection and went out of the room.

In the corridor Mr. Paint, leaning against some hot-water pipes, was waiting for her. He wore a khaki uniform like that of a British officer, but with the coloured arm badges of his association. His comfortable middle was girt by a loose and pendant Sam Browne belt, the buckle of which somehow recalled pictures of Oliver Cromwell. His face was red and shining, a few fair curls ringed his premature baldness. All his features collaborated in a permanent smile.

He greeted her, Glory replied.

"Seen anything of Little Goldylocks, Pop?" she asked him.

"Snow again. I don't catch your drift."

"English kid on the steamer last night, I mean. Jill

## Feminine Touches

and the rest of it, whatever she called herself. Her room's next to mine, but I'm not crazy on early morning visits and I've not seen her since we struck the hotel.

"I reckon she woke the cocks this morning, before they'd cleared their throats. I heard her splashing in her bathroom about then. She'll have done half what the Peace Treaty left of Hungary by now."

Mr. Paint had seen Jill sitting in the hall as he came upstairs.

"Nice kid that," Glory said, "nice mannered and well brought up. Reminds me exactly of what I never was at her age. Oh cut it out, Pop! Don't waste time busting to contradict. By the time you've got a compliment fixed a girl's had time to say good-bye and walk two blocks."

"I don't cotton to girls any," said Mr. Paint. "Give me a woman with sense to her." He regarded Glory with the admiration of a grocer surveying a side of bacon.

They reached the first floor before Glory spoke.

"I like that kid. Though I don't take to girls often either. Pretty too, if she'd get busy and make the most of herself. She wants more of the "don't care a damn if I am" about her. She don't take enough for granted. I'm going to see what can be done with her."

"Won't Momma be just pleased," remarked Mr. Paint.

They were crossing the half landing, which formed a sort of Juliet balcony overlooking the oval hall. Mr. Paint pointed out Jill, her head bent over a book. Glory clapped and waved her hand.

"Gee, look at the little wood violet. Just like me at her age. What's that, Poppa?"

They came to the sofa where Jill sat. Glory broke in upon her thoughts.

"Why, kid, are you ready to feed? And aren't I just cheered to see you. We lunch together, kid?"

Jill looked up and smiled. She had been for a walk by herself, had explored part of the town. She had still the sensation of well-being after the exercise and the frosty air. But since she had come indoors she had begun to

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feel rather lonely in this big, strange hotel, and was glad to see any one that she knew.

"Good morning, Mrs. Heathcote." She got up and shook hands with both the Americans. "I'd love to lunch with you if you're sure you don't mind."

Glory caught her arm, and holding it inside her own led her into the restaurant. To be led by Glory was like being taken charge of by a force of nature. How springy her step is, Jill thought. It is like dancing. She envied the other's invariable high spirits. When she herself was alone and had no work to do, she easily became depressed : and she was glad of the tonic influence that emanated from the American.

Mr. Paint asked Jill what she had seen in the town, and she began to tell them. Glory was not interested in inanimate objects, especially at second hand, so in a little while she interrupted.

"Isn't lil' Jill's hat just too hopeful ? Sort of leather tam, is it ?"

Jill was rather proud of this cap which she had bought with a ten-shilling money order, a Christmas present from her rich aunt who lived in South Street, and with a very important addition from her own funds. The cap itself was a cigar-coloured *beret* made of antelope and embroidered with red wool and tinsel thread.

Glory was certainly more interested in this hat than she had been in the description of Jill's walk. She would not quickly tire of the subject.

"Isn't it just too hopeful ? Oh, there's a seam there. Sure ! And it's just leather. Yes. My dear, you mustn't wear it like that."

She leaned over the table and with both hands and a tug adjusted Jill's cap to a more rakish angle.

"Gee, all the difference. Somehow girls never fix their things right."

The waiter, whose service had been interrupted, stood with stolid indifference by Jill's side. She was blushing to the roots of her hair, and felt that every one in the restaurant must be looking at her ; that she must always

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have worn the hat wrongly ; that probably every one had thought it dowdy, had laughed at her. . . . And she had been so proud of it, too. That was bad enough : but to have it corrected in public !

Glory was absorbed in her improvements. She regarded Jill critically.

"That's better," she pronounced. "Now you just look at yourself." She extracted a small mirror from the mixed cargo of her bag and thrust it into Jill's hand. She gets worse and worse, Jill thought.

When she had been seventeen she had bought a mirror like that, especially to impress an uncle who was going to take her out to lunch. It would make her seem very grown up, such a woman of the world, she had thought. But somehow, when she had examined her reflection in it, the result upon her uncle had not been what she had hoped for. The episode had ended in some very mild expostulation on his part, but the remembrance of it still had the power to make her uncomfortable. Since then she had never used a looking-glass in public. Now that one was put into her hand she pretended to peer into it, feeling that it was very bad style.

"Oh yes, oh yes, the hat's much nicer like that," she said. "Thank you ever so much." She attempted to restore the mirror to its owner.

"You can't see like that, my baby dunce," said Glory. Taking her hand in hers and making her hold up the mirror, she began to re-arrange Jill's curls.

At Jill's school the younger girls had been made to stand on a form as a punishment. She could still remember those agonies of self-consciousness and wondered if they could have been worse than what she was now suffering.

Glory broke off from her labour.

"Why, kid, you're blushing," she said. "Why, of all the . . . ain't you just sweet like that, but, honey, I'm real sorry. Now, now, don't be angry with Glory. You'll get used to me. Nothing I say worries Poppa Paint any. Does it ?"



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"Don't mind me," she went on. "I can't help it, but—Gee—I'd give a pile to blush like that. Why if I could teach you to fix your clothes, and after that you could still hoist that blush of yours, why—half the young fellers in London will be selling their ancestral castles to buy you book-kays. You'll be able to take half share in the flower store and supply the goods yourself. But, kid, don't you mind if I put you wise about clothes and such and such. I know." Then with emphasis, "I've been there.

'I used to stand on the side-walks and watch toques in the windows. Then I tried to fix some like them, but they were just harrowing; then I tried again and fixed them worse. You could stick as many pins in a down pillow as I made duds. It wasn't any manner of good, so I just watched and saved on food till I bought a model; nothing to it, just a black stock shape and ten cents' worth of veil under the brim and over one eye; the hopefulest little hat I ever struck. I made fifty like that inside a week, and that started me. Hats and shirt-waists paid my trip to Eu-rope. Once I got here, why, it was just like slipping on a banana skin. If a girl's got brains enough to get quit of the States and get over to Eu-rope she won't starve when she gets here. Glory made hats and hats made Glory.

"But see, honey, I didn't start near the top landing like you. Why it's just easy for you. But never get too proud to learn. When Glory talks about frocks, she knows! It isn't the dollars you pay, it's style that gets there. Now don't you get huffed when I tell you things, will you, honey?"

While she had been talking Jill, glancing in the glass panel on the wall, had noticed what an improvement had been made to her cap by a pluck here and there from practised hands. The merest touch had made all the difference. It suited her far better now and the knowledge of this gave her assurance. She was pleased, like a flattered child.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you. I'd love you to tell me things."

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"That reminds me," said Mr. Paint. Glory laced her fingers under her chin, assumed suddenly an expression of eager interest and resigned herself to the anecdote that followed.

After a sentence or two Jill found herself wondering how often Mr. Paint had told the story. He had the words too right and too ready.

It was about some incident and the recent Bolshevik rule in Hungary. At some point the words took meaning upon themselves for a short while.

"Why at this table are there real high-grade, elegant forks?" He held up one. "Ditto knives, but spoons . . . kind'er eating-house line. Why? I'll put you wise. Bela Khun's boys didn't steal knives, they carried 'em in their belts. They didn't want forks 'cos they made better practice with their fingers; but spoons, why, every Bolshie baby will be born with a gross of Ritz pattern German silver spoons in his mouth."

Jill's attention had wandered again. The restaurant was long, with lofty French windows along three sides of it. At one end they looked upon the street. It is like the London Ritz, she thought. That would be Piccadilly. She had only once been taken to the Ritz, but she had learnt its geography while waiting under its arcade in the wet weather for the coming of a 'bus.

Outside the windows that ran along the length of the room was the terrace, and beyond that a small public garden. Jill nodded. . . . "Green Park."

On the left she could see the Embankment and the Danube, but she could not remember whether the dining-room of the Ritz in London had any southern windows looking towards the "Buck House." What did the outside of the hotel look like, as one saw it, crossing the Park by the shop girls' walk from Victoria to Bond Street?

She was trying to picture it, when Glory's voice recalled her attention.

"Lil' Jill, Poppa Paint is going to take us for a joy ride in his auto. He doesn't know it, but he is. That's

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so, Pop, isn't it? We'll just get our wraps on while he goes out and fixes it."

*They rose from the table. Jill made room for the elder woman to pass, but Glory, taking her arm, led her out by her side. Jill did not much care for endearments in public, but did not resent them from Glory.*

"I'm getting used to her," she realized, "and I think I like her."

## CHAPTER IX

### “What a Game it Is !”

THE first three weeks that she spent in Budapest were probably the most critical in Jill's life, although this period was quite uneventful for her. Nothing of any importance happened, yet these weeks led her, step by step, gradually, but, as it seemed to her afterwards, quite inevitably to a course incredibly remote from the expected. Perhaps it was this very uneventfulness which made such strange developments possible, in so short a space of time. After all, it is probable that it is not action but reflection which changes us. Inaction, like sleep, is a time of growth.

During these weeks Glory and Jill led the normal life of travellers in a strange capital. They lunched and dined in several different restaurants : they explored the old streets of Buda : they motored about the surrounding country and several times drove up to the golf course, which lies on a mountain side, only quarter of an hour's run from the centre of the town.

They used to go round the course with the Scotch professional called Goodwilly who was glad of the chance of talking English as a native tongue. Most Hungarians, he told them, insisted on practising their English on him, so that he always felt that he was expected to teach his golf and his language at the same time.

“And I only get paid for ‘gouf,’” he added. “T'snot right.”

He had been in Budapest all through the war and had been very well treated ; indeed he had not been interfered with in any way and had been allowed to follow his calling, just as he always had done.

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"Then you really were as well off as if you'd been at home," Glory had said to him.

"Ai wou'na say that," he answered cautiously, as if much hung on such an admission; then after due reflection, he added with some relish, "T'were not like hame, but t'were no worse than being in England, ye ken."

Once during the war he had given a lesson to General Mackenson, who was stopping in the city on his way to the Roumanian front and had come up to the links for some exercise. Goodwilly had heard that he was a first-rate general, but knew he would never make a golfer.

There had never been the slightest feeling against England in Hungary, he told them. Indeed, before the war, the Hungarian aristocracy had modelled itself as far as it could on the English, down to its clothes and the names of its dogs.

Even when the war came, the admiration for England and everything English persisted in spite of energetic German propaganda.

They had had very little interest in the other fronts. Indeed, they had been secretly rather amused at the boastful Prussians, whom they disliked, being checked and then definitely held up by a few divisions of British troops on the Flanders coast. It was the training in sport that did it, they had said, feeling that their own ideals also had been vindicated. For they had always stood for the trained courage of the individual against the Austro-Germanic theory of the machine army.

Jill saw several Hungarians playing golf. Both men and women wore clothes more like those of English people that would have been seen in any other Continental country. They wore these, too, without the self-consciousness which makes the average foreigner, when dressed for sport, behave as if he were in fancy dress or had been induced, much against his will, to take a part in amateur theatricals, and, then, rather fancied the costume.

The Hungarians can wear English clothes without altering them to express their individual or national temperament. No one could probably appreciate this

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sartorial reticence who has not seen a young Italian sportsman with a divided loyalty to Byron and his tailor's fashion-plate.

Neither Jill nor Glory were good players ; Jill for want of practice, and Glory because she seemed always to be thinking of something else. They played several times, but the afternoons were short and they could not play for long.

The links lay on the flat top of a range of very high hills which shelter Budapest on one side. When sundown ended their game, Jill and Glory would stand in the chilly stillness of the evening at the top of the plateau, from which the hillside broke away between the lower country.

The view from there was wonderful. Far below them the Great Plain of Hungary stretched endlessly to an infinite East, blue, grey and purple in the gathering mists, and across it the river wound its flaming course to the unguessable distances of the horizon.

Jill, who had lately lived so much in cities, loved to linger, losing herself in the regretful splendour of these moments : till Glory, tiring of such profitless magnificence, would break the spell. Then they would return, silent and hurrying through the first gloom, to where the motor stood behind the deserted little club-house.

Several times they went to the Opera, where, by virtue of the exchange, a box cost them only a few shillings. The Opera House itself was smaller than the Vienna one and the singing was not so good, but the remaining spirit of Royal and aristocratic favour made the place pleasanter than the other, where sallow cosmopolitans and Jews reigned supreme. The Budapest Opera House had the prim superiority of the confectioner's shop in a county town, which advertises unobtrusively on its paper bags that it is patronized by the nobility and the gentry.

At the Opera they once saw the Archduchess, who lived in Budapest and who represented the Habsburg faction in the political life of the capital and in society. She was accompanied by ladies-in-waiting of unusual dowdiness, who succeeded, by contrast, in giving some distinction

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to their mistress Another night Admiral Horthy, the Regent and ruler of Hungary, sat in the old Imperial box, a fine figure of a man. His visits and those of the Archduchess were arranged, so that they should not both be in the theatre at the same time. In such ways and by much tact and self-effacement he did his best to soothe the damaged dignity of the Habsburgs.

\* \* \* \* \*

In Vienna Jill, through her work, had known something of the political currents that flowed under the surface of life in that capital, but in Budapest she was only a traveller staying in a hotel. She rather missed the sensation of being in the secret of what was happening behind the scenes, of being "in the know."

Of the intrigues of the various Habsburg aspirants to the throne she had learnt in Vienna. She wished there was some one to tell her who was who amongst the various diplomatic groups in the hotel, and to tell her what plots they were hatching.

Budapest stood between the old chaos of the Balkans and the new Treaty-made chaos of Central Europe, between the hasty expediency of the West and the incurable inefficiency of the East. Lately it had been the battle-ground of Bolshevik and reactionary principles; and in this small capital the two great faiths of Europe to-day had striven for supremacy. Alone in Mitel-Europe she now stood loyal to the old traditions, a *nouveau pauvre*, aristocratic nation surrounded by those newly-made States: beggars on horseback most of them, and on stolen mounts at that.

Thus Budapest had become a centre of foreign intrigue. The town was full of spies and agents of these less civilized nations. Such nations had now outwardly reformed. "We are in good company now, we must be careful," as the Serbian cabinet minister said when in 1914 he found his country fighting on the same side as England.

There were in Budapest missions of the various Entente and Allied States. The members of most of these missions were trying to "make a bit on their own," which led them

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to consort with the shiftiest of commercial adventurers and so increased the distrust with which they were regarded.

There were also in the city Bolshevik agents, both Russian and Hungarian; some subsidized by neighbouring states, which wanted a weak Government or perhaps none at all in Hungary. The struggle between the Entente and the Central Powers and between the Reds and the White Reactionaries were no longer waged in the field, but survived as intrigues in the cafés. Pan-Semites with wide nostrils and protruding animal ears shivered and conspired against the dim, scarcely extant White Terror.

Jill often used to wonder, as she sat in the restaurant of the Ritz, what the guests at the other tables were discussing. These were chiefly foreigners, for the prices were too high for most Hungarian men and for almost all respectable Hungarian women. Soldiers and occasionally a few sailors of foreign nationalities took their meals at the hotel.

There was an Italian princess who some said was in reality only a marchesa and who never seemed to wear the same dress twice. She always sat at a table surrounded by her patently admiring countrymen, who, according to Glory, looked as if they had been weaned on nicotine. She was willowy and so amazingly thin that one wondered how there could be room inside her for the organs normal to humanity, or, less kindly, for the vast platefuls of macaroni which she consumed. Her bearing was tragic and temperamental, and there was about her an air of permanent and melancholy *ennui*, a sort of decorative discontent, as if she had wearied of all the exotic pleasures and had never discovered the simple ones.

Sometimes, as she sat over her coffee, mysterious-looking strangers came to kiss her languid hand and sit by her side, whispering into an invisible ear. Yet, however earnestly they whispered, her expression never changed nor did she lose, for an instant, her air of Delphic abstraction. Jill used to wonder if these mysteries were of a national or of an imminently personal nature.



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At a small table in the window there was an elderly Frenchman with defiant moustaches and eyebrows, who was known to all as *le bon dieu*, though no one seemed to know exactly why; no more for that matter than they knew what he was doing in Budapest. Some said that he was a diplomat, but though he occasionally wore uniform, no one of the French Mission ever spoke to him in public; though it was rumoured that members of it walked with him up and down the deserted Danube embankment on dark, gusty evenings, when the dwarf acacia trees rocked and muttered. He would sometimes during meals receive notes which were brought to him by a porter; he would nod and put them in his pocket without reading them, but with a maddening air of importance. Some said that he paid to have them brought to him.

There were two or three groups of White Russian officers in outlandish uniforms and blouse-like tunics, but with here and there a strangely familiar detail of British clothing or equipment. One of these, a positive giant, used to walk about in a long British khaki overcoat and a huge cap like those of our Guards, but made of white bear-skin.

With one of these groups was a Russian baroness with dark curls and short bobbed hair who dressed sometimes in a man's uniform and sometimes in an extremely décolletée evening dress; this change of sex giving her the suggestion of a rather indelicate masquerade. Actually she was said to be a vastly serious person who always carried poison about her, in case she were kidnapped by Red agents. It was rumoured that she had been recently spying in White interests at Trotsky's Headquarters.

Another curious woman was a German baroness, most marvellously dressed and of attractive, if evil, appearance, said to have been employed, during the war, by the Secret Service of the Imperial Headquarters. Many men of different nationalities used to dine with her, and as she sipped her wine, she watched them ceaselessly, with an expression so cunning and diabolical, that Jill and Glory

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used to wonder how she could ever obtain confidences from any one, or be of use as a secret agent.

On this subject Glory one evening expressed a theory that men gave themselves away more when they were on their guard than when they suspected no danger ; and that, by seeing what subjects they avoided, a clever woman, whom they thought to be a spy, might learn more than she ever would from chance confidences she might obtain if they fancied themselves safe with her.

Besides these there were the ministers of Spain and Poland and of other countries, with their families, attachés, lovers and dependants.

These various parties were a source of constant interest to Jill, and of distrust to each other. There was something of the comic opera atmosphere in their activities ; these seemed too exaggerated to be real.

## CHAPTER X

### Jill Observes the Demi-Monde

**A** *NOTHER* source of amusement in the restaurant of the Ritz were the cocottes. Only the most notorious and consequently the most prosperous of these could afford post-war Ritz prices, but five or six of them lunched daily at the hotel.

Jill, who had known very little of this side of life, was much interested in these wonderfully-dressed charmers. She would have liked to have asked all sorts of questions but did not dare to do so, till Glory, who had lost the squeamishness of the new world, broke the ice for her and talked about the *demi-monde* with freedom. She even induced Mr. Paint to reluctantly outrage his trans-Atlantic puritanism and find out their names and the gossip about them.

The *ingénue* to-day, unless she is precociously serious or a born prig, will not be much concerned about the other's lack of virtue: however shocking a bedraggled *fille de joie* may be it is not easy to be disgusted with any one who wears chinchilla and pearls.

Of course when women grow older they look at things differently; many honest women of thirty really do abhor those who are no longer one and not yet the other.

The cocottes of Budapest are probably the most beautiful in the world. They rise to affluence younger than they would in Paris. There is a reason for this. The Hungarian man is of an essentially simple and virile type and chooses his mistress for her youth and good looks. The Parisian or the Roman, who is at heart a *poseur*, chooses his to increase his reputation, and therefore chooses some one already well known. To realize the

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truth of this one has only to remember that the leaders of the Parisian *demi-monde* are usually on the sad side of thirty-five. They are valued for their past achievements more than for their present charms. This one has ruined a millionaire banker, that one was the *chère amie* of a Grand Duke, another has a tradition of having been supported so long by men of breeding that she has almost become aristocratic.

The Hungarian cocottes are peculiar in other ways. To show their affluence and independence they like to lunch in pairs or even alone: to be seen having lunch with a man might suggest that one could not afford to pay for it oneself. This idiosyncrasy of theirs disturbed the French residents very much, as Jill afterwards heard. Indeed one of these said to a Hungarian officer, "But what good can it do a man to have an intrigue or to keep an expensive mistress if no one knows about it."

By the end of ten days Jill, like every one else in the hotel, knew by sight the six or seven leaders of the *demi-monde* who were always to be seen at the same tables at luncheon time. Mr. Paint supplied scandals about them.

There was the Necker Baby, easily the most remarkable of them. She could not have been more than twenty-four. Behind the footlights, as Jill saw her one night, she certainly was very attractive, for she danced well and had a really lovely body charmingly though scarcely clad. Off the stage, being less able to display this, her chief attraction, she was at a disadvantage. Her bobbed hair was not of an interesting shade, and she was too small to have attracted, normally, much attention; but if the conventions forced her to hide her chief claim to beauty and nature made her otherwise inconspicuous, the Baby found means to assert herself.

She did this by the usual method of wearing unusual clothes, and by the extraordinary expedient of painting herself twice as much off the stage as on it. This artificiality was carried to such an extent that her face had the appearance of being a mask, indeed sometimes a comic one. She spurned the pallor of a corpse, so beloved

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of the Latin peoples, for the whiteness of the clown. An overworked fashioner of Dutch dolls might have dabbed the colour on her cheeks. She made no serious attempt to copy nature. There was in her character, as in her appearance, a strong strain of defiance, which made her a "character" and was the subject of many anecdotes about her.

She came of a most respectable family, for her father was a University professor. The story was told of how he had once written to his daughter, asking her at least to adopt some other name and how she had replied that, excepting herself, no other member of the family had ever achieved fame; and that, if he did not like to bear the same name as herself, he need not, as he could change his.

Her nickname "Baby" followed her family name because in Hungarian the christian name is always placed after, instead of before, the surname: and as in most Continental countries a leading cocotte is looked upon almost as a national institution, the definite article was used. One spoke of the Necker Baby as one speaks in England of the Oaks or of the Slade.

She contrived to be always dressed in an unexpected way. One morning when lunching quite alone she would wear a frock as elaborate as one might see at Longchamps, the next she would appear in a dress so startlingly workmanlike that she might have just dismounted from a racing motor bicycle. Sometimes she affected a costume the skirt of which was so short that it scarcely covered her knees, but which had a collar so high that it almost met the brim of her hat, and quite hid her chin. Occasionally, to be different from her rivals, the Baby would drop into the restaurant in clothes as shabbily discreet as those of an out-of-work lady's-maid.

At the moment she was living in prosperous rectitude on the money she had recently obtained from a foreigner.

She was always the *gamine*, at best a witty little spitfire and at worst a foul-mouthed little demon; for she prided herself greatly that, despite her bourgeois upbringing,

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she could outdo any market woman in bad language.

The very opposite of the Baby was Ghent Lucie, a young fair-haired girl with a delightful up-turned nose and half-closed blue eyes. She always sat very demurely erect nibbling her food and seldom lifting her eyes from her plate except if some one spoke to her, when her smile was sudden and delightful.

Only a few years before she had been a peasant girl, working barefooted in the Transylvania fields. She had passed in a very short time through the stages of being a scullery-girl, the mistress of a small commercial and a dancer in a *café chantant* to her present position. If there had been no glory, there had been certainly some romance in her rocket-like flight, and a little of the glamour of her dazzling course still lit her and radiated from her. She was still a little surprised at it all.

There was nothing coarse about her build as one might have expected from her birth, but the Magyar peasant is often as lithe as the goose girl of a fairy story, and there is not in the Magyar peasantry any taint of vulgarity. They do not ape the dress or customs of the towns. Tradition is their incentive and permanency their aim. They have some of the finer impulses of aristocracy.

So Lucie dressed very quietly and her jewelry was of that worthy kind which is inherited but seldom bought. No one could have wished his daughter to have behaved better than she did in public.

Of a still different type was the Czristincovitch, a tall, clear cut amazon, usually severe in a dark riding habit. She came of a noble Polish family and had run away from a convent school with a Russian officer, who had soon deserted her. As well as depending on the favours of a succession of admirers, she had bought with the proceeds of their lavishness a small but very select café to which the young men of the town went, as to a *salon*. These three stood in a class by themselves, but there were others who came to the Ritz for luncheon and who occasionally even dined there.

Usually, however, cocottes take their evening meal in

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the momentarily favourite of the many little restaurants which, for some obscure reason, were called bars.

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One night Glory, Jill and Mr. Paint stumbled by chance upon the bar which at the moment was the centre of select night life in the city.

"I'm just crazy for the bite of a Dry Martini or the twang of a Clover Club," Glory had said to the head waiter of the Ritz. "I can't cotton to this Bay Rum and Bismuth you serve up here. You'r wine takes beating, but the Austrian liqueurs are not fit to take paint off decent woodwork. Isn't there any place in the city where one can get the real stuff?"

The waiter's advice had led them that night to dine at this bar, where they found themselves surrounded by lace and tinsel hats and tantalizing décolletages: the tablecloths no doubt hid little except indiscretions. There were more men in evening dress than they usually saw at the hotels where the *clientèle* was usually foreigners, of whom Glory had said, "Guess funds ran dry before they'd come to Tuxedos and boiled shirts."

The lighting arrangements were more becoming than is usual in expensive hotels. There were shaded electric candles on the tables and no other illumination, so that the ceiling was in deep shadow and the dark walls vague.

Along each side of the little restaurant small partition walls divided the place into boxes like those in a theatre. In the centre were less desirable tables clustering before the grand piano where a musician played ragtime and sensuous Viennese waltz tunes while a pale Jewish youth sang caressingly words that, from his expression, were evidently unsuited to a stronger light. Glory, who was not musical, was rather glad to have escaped from the inevitable *tziganes*.

The food was excellent and the cocktails made Glory brilliantly conversational; Mr. Paint's complexion became more varnished than ever and Jill grew indifferent to the future.

After ten o'clock the Necker Baby and her rivals

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appeared from the theatres and brought with them their cavaliers and an odour of expensive scent. With their arrival the gaiety grew; corks popped in shadowed corners, glasses clinked above the laughter and the murmur of conversation. The voice of the Jew vocalist grew softer and more insinuating. He sidled between the tables and sang to various ladies. For a long time he stood before the Necker singing to her with half-closed eyes as if she and he were alone in the room, and beating time in the haze of cigarette smoke with unpleasantly graceful hands.

Glory was coldly critical of everything and Mr. Paint seemed interested in nothing except drawing the greatest possible amount of air through his cigarette, but Jill was carried away by the novelty of the scene.

How deliciously wicked everything and everybody was, she thought, deliciously because she was conscious of that feeling of well-being and universal sympathy that good wine brings.

The Necker Baby, whose raiment above the level of the table consisted of two discreetly-placed satin leaves, seemed to Jill a delightfully irrepressible tomboy. Lucie Ghent in her chinchillas, with the soft pink light glowing on her warm colouring and fair hair, seemed the essence of girlish charm. The Czristincovitch, at her shadowed corner table, was a grave and noble presence, darkly cloaked and dark haired, her chin resting on her black gloved hands. Her expression was moody and reflective; she might have been thinking of those long weary Polish winters of her childhood, when the snow lay for weeks around the walls of her father's castle.

The haze of cigarette smoke gave a softness to outlines and a delicacy to tints. Above in the upper air all was gloom, but the pink light on the tables lent a blush to the women's cheeks; it lent red and golden glints to their hair; it transformed powder into the bloom of youth. Wine and wise shading can work wonders.

Presently, when the Jew came over from the piano and sang to Jill some sentimental Austrian version of an



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English tune, she was so enthralled that she did not notice the passage of time till her cigarette burnt her fingers. She escaped that awful disillusionment that youth so often suffers when it first encounters the gay world and finds it shoddy. First impressions are so important; they fix or dispel prejudices and create in the mind a picture which it may take years of experience to correct. It is a matter of importance that Jill was not disgusted by her first view of the light women of the town in their own particular setting.

As it was, the magic of the music, the wine, the glitter and the hour carried her on till she closed her eyes, happy and tired, in bed that night.

Nine girls out of every ten will watch with interest any one who is pointed out to them as being well known. A cocotte who is by trade ornamental is more interesting to them than, say, a statesman, who at best is only useful. Besides, the cocotte being a woman is more comprehensible and has a glamour which attaches to successful wrong-doing.

Jill had seen only the pleasanter side of life in the half-world; the beautiful clothes, the glitter and the gaiety. Knowing so little of such things, the only irk of the cocotte's life was the necessity of attracting men; and the idea in abstract did not shock her because she had never had to do it.

To any young girl attracting men would have meant attracting the nicest of the young men they had known and this probably to the limit of being kissed resistingly in a cab. To let it be seen that one was trying to captivate a man would be damaging to one's self-respect: but then it would be easy to hide one's designs. Almost every girl takes for granted that she knows intuitively everything that there is to know about the way to deal with men. That's how the accidents happen.

However young, a girl seems to assume that she knows everything about sex relationships; theoretically, at any rate, the rest can easily be picked up. These mere details appear to her, according to her temperament, as an

## Jill Observes the Demi-Monde

exciting or as a rather distasteful field for experiment.

Jill knew, vaguely, of course, that a cocotte may have to give herself to a man who does not attract her : but then she knew that many married women, even happily married ones, have to do the same.

The more successful a cocotte is the more she can pick and choose, and when one is young one is inclined to fancy one's place will be nearer the top than the bottom of any occupation.

Jill, if she had imagined anything so distasteful at all, would have thought of herself as a queen of the *demi-monde*, very wicked no doubt, but an enormously successful, exquisitely dressed and greatly sought after, a distressing but certainly not a distressed example of frailty.

## CHAPTER XI

### The Skeleton at the Feast

**W**HEN Jill thought of it afterwards her first fortnight in Budapest seemed to have been divided into a number of confused, full and happy days, all more or less alike, and into nights of solitary distress, each of which she appeared to remember separately. After the first few days, when the novelty of her surroundings had begun to diminish, the sequence of events ceased to be distinct in her memory. Her recollection of the days was of incidents, quite unimportant and unrelated, of some scenes in an opera, of a walk with Glory along the riverside in frosty moonlight, of trifling purchases in shops, of the first time a *tzigane* had left his orchestra and crossed the restaurant to play to her.

In her remembrance and perhaps in their influence upon her, the nights loomed much more important, in spite of their lack of actual events, than the days; for the nights were times of reflection, and, after all, it is not actions or adventures but the thoughts they produce, which mould our characters.

By day she could live in the present, for she was seldom alone, but by night the shadows of the future haunted her. Her resources were rapidly dwindling; she could not afford to lengthen her stay beyond the limit she had chosen. Each evening when Glory had kissed her good-night and the door had closed behind her, the thought came to Jill that the end of her stolen holiday had drawn twenty-four hours nearer. Each night she lay awake longer and longer, fretting, sometimes rebelliously and sometimes hopelessly, against the colourless yet uncertain life that awaited her.

## The Skeleton at the Feast

Often she longed, as a child does, for the shelter of protecting arms. Then she would clasp her pillow tightly against her cheek. If Glory had been of her own age, she would have gone to her for comfort, but the whole trend of her upbringing with a practical undemonstrative mother and a father only spasmodically interested in his children, had made her unaccustomed to seek sympathy in older people.

Besides that, though Glory was good-natured, she would not in the least understand. She, who had had to make her own way in the world and who had succeeded, would probably have forgotten all her early fears. She would not be inclined to remember any part that good fortune had played in her own career ; she would attribute her achievements to determination and expect to find as much of it in others.

Jill did not imagine that the older woman would be able to understand how she was suffering and she did not connect Glory with such simple emotions as blind sympathy. If she could have cried, she would have been relieved, but tears come usually in answer to the suddenness of a blow and this anxiety was the reverse of sudden : its effect was slow and cumulative. There was no one to whom she could confide her anxiety, and she had no work to divert her thoughts.

All she could do was to try and make herself believe that she would easily find work and that she would be able to keep it. Yet even this prospect did not offer any very enviable life for her.

If she had even the smallest income of her own it would make all the difference.

She knew that there must be thousands of girls living with their families cloistered by social conventions in narrow country homes who would have given much for even such freedom as she would have. Perhaps if Jill had been so placed, she would have preferred the future which lay before her ; but she had been her own mistress for so long that the first zest of liberty had passed. Many who have hated constraint have not found happiness in

## Sweet Pepper

escaping it. In any case to whatever freedom one may attain one will still see freedom, burning like some bright endicing star as remote as before.

Certainly she would have every evening to herself and a day and half each week. At such times she would be free, free to stay in the small chilly bedroom of her lodgings and free to go out of it, but it is little pleasure to have time to oneself if one has nothing to do.

If she were in an office all day she would not be likely to get many invitations for the evenings. People would not be likely to think, poor thing she leads such a dull life, but she is free every evening, we must really ask her . . . more likely they would say . . . it's so tiresome she can never come to lunch or anything one asks her to, and would then forget her existence.

If ever she did meet some young man at a dance and she pleased him, he might ask her to tea next day. Then she would have to refuse. To ask her to dine would be quite a different matter, more of an undertaking, meaning more in every way. Besides, he might think that a chaperone would be necessary : that would entail for enjoyment a party of four, difficult to arrange at short notice and expensive. Not lunch ? . . . Not tea ? . . . A pity ! . . . Well, anyhow, they would be sure to meet somewhere soon.

So what might easily have been a chance of release would escape her.

## CHAPTER XII

### What the Mirror Saw

**I**T must be remembered that Jill's luxurious life in Budapest was only a short, stolen holiday before she went back to London to settle down. Glory would move on to renew her comfortable existence elsewhere, but for her this was perhaps the last chance of careless enjoyment. She was having her fling: but soon she must return, Cinderella like, to look for work.

She tried to forget that this happy freedom would soon be over, but the dread of that hunt for work that lay before her stood ever behind her shoulder in her thoughtful moments and at night crept closer and chilled her. She grudged the passing of the hours. She envied Glory the light-heartedness which had enabled her to overcome so many difficulties; but then in one way it had been easier for her, because Glory had risen from nothing and could only slip back to where she came from. Her upbringing, too, had made her less squeamish and more insensitive.

Glory hated being alone. "You'll be alone long enough when one's dead," she said; and she often asked Jill to come to her room while she undressed at night.

To Jill the other's tortoise-shell and gold brushes, her many hats, and most of all, perhaps, her purely decorative underclothes were a revelation. It would be nice to possess toilet implements like these and to have numberless little bottles and pots on one's dressing-table, she thought, but it would be nice, too, to own a beautiful house, to have an electric brougham and a maid to darn one's stockings. The wonderful brushes, like all these other things, were too remote to be really coveted by her. What she did long for were such underclothes.

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Were women ever so tempted before ? Surely never ! It must be harder to resist those jewel-dewed platinum cobwebs of Cartier and those inconsequent gossamers which hide nothing and which it seems scarcely just to hide, than the massy ornaments and the shift of honest cambrie, that were offered to our grandmothers.

Can it be that these increased temptations have produced our larger licence ? But it cannot : for, as a political economist would no doubt tell us, demand creates supply ; and women must have created the demand.

It would be too fanciful to imagine some elderly Parisian *roué*, finding that the midinettes no longer nibbled at his bait of trinkets, searching, as he shuffled along the boulevards, for some new bribe to attain his ends ; and, having conceived so base a plan, calling into collaboration some famous modiste to compose the first really seductive chemise.

It must have been those, who earned their bread by their charms, who were the first to use *les dessous* as an *apéritif*. Yet the fact remains that such garments were created, because women wished to render more delicious each successive stage to nudity. . . . Perhaps they had taken to heart the quip, that a woman loses a charm with every garment that she discards.

Jill like other girls longed, quite innocently, for such elaborate garments as Glory's, more wonderful than any she had ever seen, even in shop windows. Compared with them, her own, which she made herself of *voile* and ribbon, and of which she had once been so proud, seemed coarse and clumsy.

One evening, while Glory was undressing, she had asked Jill to get her a clean nightdress from the wardrobe. When Jill had given her one, she had turned over the others, fingering the laces lovingly.

" Like them, kid ? " Glory asked.

Jill nodded and smiled abstractedly, for she was wondering if she would ever have time to copy one.

" Well take the one you like best and keep it. I've got half a saratoga full, and I'm sure to buy more when I'm

## What the Mirror Saw

back in Paris. You'll find the rest of the set on the shelf below."

Jill rushed across the room and kissed her. She did not remember having felt so grateful to any one for years. To possess such garments for her very own! She laid half a dozen on the bed to choose from.

"Oh, Glory, you are a darling!" she said. "You are indeed," and slipped an arm round her. "Help me choose one. Oh, aren't they too lovely? This pink one or the yellow? I like the yellow. Isn't the *eau de Nil* one funny? I've never seen green undies before."

Finally she chose a lemon-yellow set, trimmed with guipure, and danced away to her room carrying it, two pairs of stockings to match and her first pair of ornamental garters, which Glory had insisted on her taking.

"Keeps your stockings from getting cock-eyed," she said.

This was the first night that Jill went to bed without remembering that another day of freedom had slipped away. She was so excited with her presents that she tore off her own clothes and let them lie as they fell, instead of folding them as her mother had taught her.

She put on the lemon-coloured chemise, the long silk stockings, the garters with their lemon chiffon rosettes and gold leaves and the drawers which scarcely reached half-way to her knees. Then she went over to the corner of the room where the wardrobe doors were mirrors and looked at her reflection in them.

She would have hardly recognized herself. The slimmness of her figure and the unusual length of leg which these underclothes showed gave her a half-boyish appearance. It reminded her of when, as a child, she had dressed as a pickaninny for a school concert.

She looked more boyish than she ever had before and yet a thousand times more attractive. Where are our sensualists leading us?

The pale lemon colour of the chiffon gave her fair hair an apricot tinge: her cheeks were flushed with pleasure. She turned herself this way and that, looking at herself



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over her shoulder and in profile. Not that she was vain, but no girl could help admiring how astonishingly these clothes added to her charm. Though they covered her from under her arm only to half-way down to her knees she did not feel in the least undressed. They were not a makeshift covering, to be hidden as quickly as possible ; they were as complete in themselves as a ball dress.

She advanced one foot and regarded with pleasure her leg in the lemon-coloured stocking. How a garter set off her knee ! She wondered why every one did not wear them. She opened one of the wardrobe doors so that she could see her back view. Turning slightly this way and that she saw how the elastic at her waist gave just the right definition to it. She was innocently proud of her body, just as an athlete might be of his ; and she was glad that it was beautiful, without consciously considering that it was attractive.

She smiled at her reflection and shook her head, setting her short hair swirling about her face.

" I look like a *Vie Parisienne* drawing," she thought, " only I ought to have a hat too."

She put on a dark tulle hat that she had made for herself in Vienna and faced the glass.

Whether it was the contrast of the black hat with the light underclothes, or the mere addition of it, she did not know, but the effect was altered and for her the spirit of it was spoiled.

Even a Paris hat is only a trivial thing, a comment of the moment on the beauty of eternity.

Her fresh and ingenuous appearance had gone and the reflection seemed half naked, almost dissolute. She felt strangely indecent and turned hastily from the mirror.

" I did not know I could look like that," she thought and shuddered. The vision she had had of herself at that moment had surprised her sense of decency. She would not have minded looking naughty, but, dressed as she had been, that black hat had made her look " bad."

As it was, this unpleasant impression remained with her

## What the Mirror Saw

all the time that she brushed her hair, tugging at it angrily with her comb, and she had to read for a long time before she was able to sleep.

Still that night she did not think of the threat of the future.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A Possible Solution

ONE morning the post brought Jill two letters, the first she had had since she had left Vienna : both were from Kitty.

The first had been written on a Sunday and the other on the following Friday : the first was by far the longer.

“DARLING LITTLE SISTER,” it began,—

“What fun for you seeing so much of the world. Of course I agree you were most wise to take a holiday before you came home. London is dismal enough at this time of the year. If one has plenty of money it’s not so bad. One can shop or go to theatres just as well in the rain, can’t one ? But by the time I leave the office everything is shut, shops and museums and everything. I do think they might keep the picture galleries open one evening a week. As it is there is nowhere to keep out of the rain. The result is I go straight home and sit indoors five nights a week as a rule.

“It rather amuses me cooking my own supper, but it makes a beastly smell in my bedroom. On Sundays I usually have a good time.

“Mr. Elstone, our manager, gets more and more tiresome. Honestly I don’t know how I put up with him. I cannot think why he can’t leave me alone. I’ve made it very clear I can’t bear him, and there are several really pretty girls and of his own class in the office. I suppose it’s because I won’t have anything to do with him that he wants to. He has made no less than three attempts to embrace me now. I shall smack his face if he does it again, I think. It is disgusting to brawl with a man like that, but what is one to do ?

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"But I mustn't trouble you.

"Oh, I wish I were out on your strange travels. Your description of the life and the cheapness of everything makes my mouth water.

"Prices here go up and up. Those stockings we all used to buy at 8/11 are up to 8/- now and they say the next lot will be more expensive still. I don't know what one will do if things go on like this. I can't ask for a rise or that would lead to another attempt to make love to me. Oh, I wish I were quit of this life and doing something on my own!

"There's such a chance of an opening. The Cousins Sarah and Isabel are going to give up the chicken farm and are going to live at Pau. They have such rheumatism that they can't work the farm any longer with that one boy.

"The other week-end I went down to see them, more out of kindness than anything else, because you know how they used to almost starve us. Well now, since the rationing and the high cost of living one is hungry all the time there. They want to get rid of the place, lock, stock and barrel, the cottage, the furniture, the chickens and the little Noah's Arks they live in and all.

"Theirs is not like one of those post-war experimental places. They've been doing it twenty years, I think they said, and it's all cut and dried. They've found out just what sorts to keep and they've got contracts with the stores and two or three clubs and hotels.

"They're a funnier old pair than ever and they're quite determined they'd like me to buy the farm off them, and thought you and I could go and run it. 'Such an opening for two girls, my dear.'

"They'd let me have it for £1,000 down and quarter profits for four years. It would have been lovely if we could have done it. That includes the runs and the cottage and the egg-boxes, pony and cart and all. They'd probably get much more in the open market.

"I've thought it all out. If we could have done it we'd have wanted £200 to live on and to fall back on to say £1,200 capital in all. We couldn't have mortgaged

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because I don't think it would be ours until the end of the four years.

"I have got practically £400 with my share of that legacy and what I've saved, so if we could only get together another £800!

"I've been all round the relations, but not much luck! I've got promises making up another £200, but that still leaves the £600, a sum we can't possibly get.

"Anyhow there's till next September to wish we could get it. Oh, how one wishes some one would suddenly produce it.

"I know you don't much like the country, but think of what it would mean having no future to worry about, and no one to work under—but that's that!

"I went to a little dance the other night, so I had to buy some silk stockings, and wished I hadn't, for they ran half-way through the evening and aren't any more good. Nearly two days' pay gone 'phut.'

"Guy Dare was there. I'd not seen him since 1917, and he'd got almost grey. It was that second time he got wounded that did it, he said. He can't be over 33. It was quite a shock to see him. He still dances beautifully and asked after you. Osbert Toogood was there, fatter and stickier than ever. He'll have to bring a dozen collars instead of two with him if he gets any fatter.

"There's no news of mother except she thinks she was wrong about the 200 per cent. profit on her tomatoes. She says that it will be more like 350 per cent. profit. May it be true!

"Well, darling, be happy,

"Ever your loving,

"KITTY."

Jill laid down the letter beside her bed and shut her eyes.

Most people wrote letters that seemed to have little to do with themselves. Uncle Dan who was large and slangy, and fond of little beyond horse racing, wrote the primest letters imaginable in a neat microscopic hand, but Kitty's letters always brought her to one's side.

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She could almost hear Kitty's rich, lazy voice and see her gentle brown eyes, the little lines at the corners of her mouth, that the struggle to overcome her natural indolence had made, the loose looping of her hair, for she was not very tidy. Kitty seemed very close. Jill could fancy her eagerness about the project of the chicken farm, for she had inherited her mother's susceptibilities for quick enthusiasms, yet she never raised her voice from those tones that were like a summer's afternoon. She was a perfect elder sister.

She could count on Kitty in almost any emergency. If she were ruffled or hurt Kitty would soothe her, not only by what she said, but by the caressing quality of her voice. If one wanted protection Kitty would be a tower of strength.

Jill's thoughts turned to the farm where her old cousins lived ; just the sort of house they ought to live in : it had an air of being antique but not worn out, the white sun-blinds pulled down to exactly match each other and the porch with the glistening bell knob and the geraniums. The house was covered with ivy, so neatly clipped that, when she had been a child, it had reminded her of a coastguard's beard. At the back of the house were the over-tidy colonies of chickens, like a Borstal system for hens. There was a drowsy walled garden with an erratic croquet lawn, and a summer-house fragrant of honeysuckle.

It was a charming enough place in which to laze away some summer weeks, but to live one's life there. . . !

Jill had grown too fond of London during those years of the war ! No ! If she could please herself she would much rather be in London. The country was all right for Kitty, who never really cared for dances or theatres.

At the distance of many months Jill remembered best the pleasant side of life in London : the rare dances seemed more frequent : the little Soho dinners and the visits to the Palladium gained greatly in remembrance.

\* \* \* \* \*

The second letter was a very short one.

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"JILL DARLING,—

"What I feared was inevitable happened, and I've lost my job. I had a most loathsome time with the manager yesterday evening after work. He kept me behind and tried to kiss me again. I was feeling very tired and off colour, and I suppose I didn't decline the honour suitably, but I won't worry you with the details of the scene. Anyhow after it was over I couldn't have gone back there again any more, and in any case I was given to understand that my job was up on Saturday week.

"It isn't an easy time to find another as the men are still coming back from the Army and get the vacancies, which is only fair. It all seemed to come just because I'd been planning about Cousin Sarah and Isabel's farm. I had been discontented I suppose because I couldn't have that, and so what I had I've now lost.

"But it only makes me want the farm more and more. Because there I'd be my own mistress and things like that couldn't happen. But I suppose it's no use crying for the moon. I've got nothing pleasant that I can think of writing, so I will end up."

The minute that Jill took to read this letter brought her from happiness to the depths of gloom. So it had happened. And now, thinking it over, it seemed to have been so inevitable . . . and this was what she must go back to in a week or two's time.

The story of how Kitty had lost her employment had been told sketchily enough: for Kitty always kept her troubles as much as possible to herself, but this particular lack of detail made the story seem more graphic to Jill.

Nightly, as she lay in her bath before dressing for dinner, the scene between Kitty and the manager of the office would grow before her, till it became as clear as a remembered incident.

The bathroom seems to make artists of us all. Unfortunately our songs sound more crude elsewhere, and the creations of our brains often vanish with the steam.

This fit of depression would last while she went down-

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stairs, and until Mr. Paint appeared, just before dinner, shiny and cheerful, bearing in a tray cocktails of his own composition.

The hour or so after she got into bed and before she slept was a time of foreboding and gloom. Once she brought her state to a climax by reading a sad book, which, coupled with her self-pity, reduced her to the relief of tears.

As the dread of unemployment and uncertainty increased, so did the project of the chicken farm seem more and more desirable.

When she had first read of it in Kitty's letter she had thought how dull she would be buried away in the country, never able to go to London because she would be tied to the farm by the feeding of the chickens and a dozen such responsibilities. But now she began to consider London as a place where conditions were scarcely tolerable for a good-looking girl if she were determined to keep her self-respect. To understand the next few months of Jill's life it is imperative to realize that, to the girl of to-day, "keeping her self-respect" and "keeping straight" are not necessarily the same.

She forgot all the happy times she had had in London. All she thought of was that if the project of the chicken farm materialized, she would be her own mistress, she would not have to look for employment.

Perhaps, after all, life at the farm would not turn out to be so dull. They would get to know some neighbours. Their old cousins must have known them. She imagined tea in the garden on slumberous afternoons, games of tennis in the cool before dusk, picnics not as exciting as those of childhood, but at which one might capture again a little of the make-believe sense of adventure.

There would be skating on the village pond and perhaps a little dancing at the smaller country houses, where she would be regarded as wonderful and possibly rather wicked, because she had lived in London. She imagined herself teaching new dance steps to pleasant, rather clumsy girls, herself very exquisite amongst them.



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The more she thought of it, the more did the idea of such a life please her, but the more impossible of realization it seemed.

Where could she and Kitty find six hundred pounds ? To write to the various relations would be no good, for Kitty had tried, and she was well known for being reliable and capable. It would not be worth while incurring a snub.

How could she and Kitty find so large a sum ? She determined to ask Glory at dinner that night. Glory had made her own way in life, she must know ways in which money could be made.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Dollars and Doughnuts

THAT night at dinner Jill asked Glory whether she thought it would be possible for her to make six hundred pounds during the year, if she gave herself heart and soul into doing it ; and if so, how she advised her to start. She explained exactly her position ; how she had only about sixty pounds capital left and, beyond her clothes, practically no salcable possessions, and how she had no interest worth mentioning to help her.

Jill had at first found it very difficult to get Glory to give her attention to the matter. Glory's vitality was of the sort that needed constant stimulant, which she obtained by letting her interest flit inconsequently from one subject to another. This conversational habit gave other people plenty of mental exercise and was pleasant enough, as long as one was willing to listen, but it was exasperating if one wanted her advice.

Throughout the first two courses Glory successfully eluded attempts to fasten down her attention. But during the long wait for the paprika chicken she had obviously begun to tire. Jill watched her and waited till the other was really at a loss. Then she asked her question again and, after a few efforts to evade concentration, Glory capitulated and gave her mind to the matter.

"Jill, honey, making money isn't any kid's game : not if you start where Glory did. They don't teach it at college. I can't explain it, else I'd make a fortune, running a postal course setting out how it was done.

"In the beginning it was like trying to locate a house at the other end of a city, where you're not acquainted and where you can't ask to be directed, 'cause you don't know

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the number of the street, though you know the house fast enough when you see it. You know which the direction is and that's all ; you've got to take every turn that leads that way. It isn't any good to just look hopeful and keen and get going down the main avenues, if they don't lead the way you want.

" You've got to take any make of road you strike, that's pointing your way, whether it's got street cars down the centre or empty food cans. If you miss the first chance of getting the way you want, it's dollars to doughnuts there won't be another.

" Sometimes when you take a street you'll find as likely as not you'll fetch up in a blind alley, or it'll lead straight to the municipal rubbish dump. You've got to take chances of that. Any way, that looked like leading to dollars, was Glory's way till it got tied or tied itself in a knot ; then I looked out for another, feeling mighty sore for myself sometimes. Other times you'll find the only way isn't one you're exactly in love with ; you can't always keep your shoes clean getting there, specially if you're a woman.

" If you've got a fond Papa who'll fix you with a parlour car and book you through, one's got nothing to do but sit tight and not get blown out of the window. Then, when one's got to the depot with the name that's printed on one's luggage check written up, one gets out and mails an article to a popular weekly on " How Honesty Pays in Business ! "

Jill nodded. " But I haven't got that. You know I haven't got any one to help, so that isn't any good."

" Guess Glory didn't get born in the right cot either, for there wasn't any Pop of that sort where I was raised. But, kid, your way to get rich, if you haven't got that kind of Papa handy either, is to find some one who has. Why, it'll be just as easy as having the toothache for you. All you've got to do is to like the sort of boys that have got the money. They were out of that kind of young fellow, too, where we lived : most our way looked like something the cat had brought in.

## Dollars and Doughnuts

“ Why, all you’ve got to do is to keep one end of a sofa warm and look pleasant, till a boy with a bank balance comes round with the teacups and waffles ; and when he sits down to just kind of balance the sofa and crosses his legs your way, don’t act as if he’d got tar on his suit.

“ Why yours will be a one-act play and a hymn tune for the curtain. I don’t say, mind you, that even a happy marriage is ideal : a happy marriage is like a dud shell : it hasn’t bust yet.”

All this might have been amusing enough for Jill if she had not been in such bitter earnest. It’s easy to look on the bright side of things when they concern some one else. Obviously marriage to a man of means would be a perfect solution to her trouble, or as nearly perfect as any one has a right to expect. But where was she to meet him. Even if she did do so, she might so easily lose him because work would prevent her from accepting some invitation or other of his. It is just the little things that count. Besides, she knew all about that ; what she wanted was some royal and easy way to wealth.

Most of us feel that any one, who has made money, could reveal to us precious secrets. Glory had been trying her best to be helpful, but she could not explain how she had come to succeed. She remembered, of course, the details of this or that success, and this or that period of want and despair ; but it was difficult to give the principles upon which she had worked, because she had never consciously had any.

“ Honey dearest, it’s so hard to tell how one did a thing,” she said. “ I just sized up early that if I didn’t get on, I’d have to get back where I started : and I wasn’t taking any chances of that, if I could help it. I did just any old thing that looked like getting me any forrarder. When I hadn’t much else to eat, I ate pride. Some of the things I did . . . but I’m not set on writing my biography yet.

“ When I didn’t seem to cotton to what came along, I just said to myself, ‘ See here, Glory, do you want to make good ? ’ . . . ‘ You bet your life ! I’m just set on it,’ I’d

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say. 'More than anything else in the wide?' . . . 'Why of course.' 'Then you'll do this, whatever it is, won't you? Just to get on.' Well I'd say, 'Just to get on.'

"It was awful hard sometimes.

"You see I went in for the dress business, but what I'd seen in my home town didn't help any. Why, in our State the men are that pure the girls never decolt, and the men won't let their wives do more than turn in the necks of their shirt waists to go to a dance.

"I did pick up the dress business somehow, but selling what I made, even when it was class, was the rub.

"One time I remember I'd staked pretty well every cent on unloading a line of hats I'd fixed. That was at the beginning. I was so stoney that summer, I couldn't afford even underclothes because they didn't show. I hear some of the swell buds don't wear them now, 'cos they might. Anyway those hats cost me more than I'd . . . well, I was cleaned out. I hadn't enough to pay my girls that week if I didn't sell. I'd counted on that sale and it was sell or go down and start again. I'd made these hats for a big store I'd done deals with before.

"The buyer was a swine, after any woman he saw. He'd been a trouble before. I suppose I kind'er looked a shade too anxious or something. Anyhow he must have guessed how I was fixed, for he wasn't going to do business just as plain business.

"Kid darling, I just cried myself to sleep with rage as much as anything else, but I bested him in the end, though. I got behind him with the manager of the store. I got him fired . . . but that was later.

"That's what's so bad for a woman. You may be able to choose who the man is, if you're lucky, but if you don't give some man his bit of nice you've got to be uncommon lucky to make good.

"But, Jill beautifullest, don't you fret. You won't have to do with that kind. When you marry, the young man will get what he wants, and you'll get what you want. That's fair: you can't have everything and give nothing.

## Dollars and Doughnuts

That's the mistake so many American women make.

"All you've got to do is not to go soft on a bright, blue-eyed boy with a hopeful future. A blue-eyed boy may end as president of a railroad . . . but then he mayn't, and it isn't any good hanging round to watch him try. Anyhow, if it's his eyes you're set on, it won't be any good. By the time he's president his eyes will have lost that beautiful, trusting look they used to have."

Jill fidgeted with the fork, her lips set tightly, a sign since childhood that she was near tears. "Yes, I know," she said a little hopelessly, "it isn't any good thinking one can have everything one would like, but I've made up my mind long ago to that. I don't want very much. Honestly, if I was sure of getting married, I wouldn't worry, but I mayn't and then—and then. . . . Oh, I don't know.

"Or again, if I'd work to do in London, I wouldn't care. But I haven't . . . and I don't know where I'm going to find it, and . . . I keep worrying and worrying and worrying. It's horrible sometimes.

"Now my eldest sister has found a chance for us both, a really safe one, it would make us both independent. All we want is a little capital. We can get half what we want, but the other six hundred is the trouble. I'd do anything to get it. I'd work till I dropped, or do anything dangerous for it. If only the Government would give me a job like I've just had only in Russia, or somewhere where it isn't safe, and where they'd have to pay me well, I'd jump at the chance.

"It does seem so hard, when one gets a chance like this to have to drop it for six hundred pounds, doesn't it? I'd give up any chance of getting married or having fun later if I could only get this, and feel certain, that way. It's want of security.

"It isn't as if I asked such a lot of life. We all thought, when we were little, that things would be the same for us as for all our friends. Then the war and father being killed left us . . . I don't ask for a good time, like my cousins and the girls I was at school with, or jolly clothes.

## Sweet Pepper

I only want just enough. If I had ever so little to be sure of, to have always. It isn't very much . . . to want. I don't often talk like this, but it isn't . . . very much . . . to ask."

Her words tailed off miserably. She was very near tears now. Reciting her woes had filled her with self-pity.

Glory rose to instant sympathy. For, if her emotions may not have been very deep, they were very close to the surface, and were easily stirred. It was this quickness of response to the feelings of others that was half the secret of her popularity, and it was quite natural to her. She would not wait till appeal was made. She was sympathetic almost before one had begun to feel the need of pity.

Now she laid so consoling a hand on her wrist and spoke so affectionately that she seemed to Jill to be kinder than any one she had known. It was this impression of Glory that she always carried afterwards.

"Jill darling," she said, "it makes Glory just wretched to see Jill so down. Why I'd do anything for you. I know how you feel about it. That hopeful little mouth of yours is all out of its proper shape: just harrowing, darling. You mustn't be so down, beautifullest. I know it does seem pretty bad, but it's just then when things take a turn. If I'd got the money you want you should have it."

Jill felt that this was true. The calculating side of Glory's character only rose to meet difficulties.

But Glory went on in a matter-of-fact voice which she kept for subjects not capable of being treated otherwise. "I don't see what I could do for you . . . right now. . . . The Society pays my board-lodging and out of pockets. That's why I'm here. I've spent all I'm for this quarter in Wien, on clothes. I guess they wouldn't put out any on next quarter's pay, if I asked them. I've got a bit in the bank back in Paris, but it's what to keep Glory with when she's old: and it isn't much of a pile yet.

"Kid, I'm real sorry, because I don't often take to any one like I have to you. I'm real fond of you, but I don't see what I can do."

## Dollars and Doughnuts

"Yes, I know," Jill said. She responded easily to sympathy, and her youthful buoyancy had already begun to reassert itself. Yet, though she felt better for having talked about her affairs and for Glory's sympathy, she had made no progress towards solving the problem of her future.



## CHAPTER XV

### The Faith of the Plains

**G**LORY and Jill were dining at the Hungaria again. The waiter, who was by now a friend of theirs, was waiting at Glory's elbow for her to order coffee, but she babbled on.

No, she didn't take to most foreigners, and she didn't set much store on her own countrymen. Englishmen were good enough for Glory. The best was most times.

Why the way they sat down as if the world belonged to them, but as if they didn't know it. She thought the Hungarian men were about the next best.

"Look at that pair over there," she said.

Jill saw at the table which Glory had pointed out two Hussar officers, one a tall, spare, angular man of about forty, stiffly resplendent in light blue and much silver braid. The set of his mouth and the glint of his grey eyes were very stern: his skin and fair, wavy hair looked dry and faded. His expression conveyed an unusual combination of reserve and weary alertness.

The other was a very different type, not so tall but sturdy, boyish and round-headed. His short-clipped moustache and hair were dark brown with a glint of red in them, and his complexion was dark. The most noticeable thing about him was the merriment in his eyes. He wore a plain undress tunic of dark blue serge. To Jill his face and quick expression seemed familiar. He was laughing at the other, as much with his eyes as with his mouth.

"I seem to know the face of the dark one," Jill was saying, when the man caught their glances and smiling rose slightly and bowed.

## The Faith of the Plains

As he did so Jill recognized him as the Hungarian whose acquaintance she had made so strangely on the steamer.

The incident had created in her mind a lasting bias. Still and ever afterwards she saw everything Hungarian through a glamour of romance and adventure. Yet, if the impression of the man had been clear and singular enough, she had thought of him afterwards as some one who did not really belong to the same matter-of-fact age as herself; as the impersonation of what to her Hungary had come to stand for, rather than as a man. Certainly the idea that she would, or even could meet him again had never occurred to her.

"Sakes, darlingest, some success!" laughed Glory, nodding her head at her in amused comment.

"I've met him before," Jill expostulated. "I met him on the steamer coming here"; then turning for support to the head waiter who still hovered at their sides, she asked him, "The gentleman over there is Count Arkozi, isn't it?"

"Count Arkozi, madame, a very old customer of ours. Why, I remember when he was a school-boy and used to stay here with his father, the old Count. A very kind gentleman is the young Count and very fond of amusing himself."

"Some parlour snake, I'd have guessed that," said Glory.

"Pardon, madame?" The head waiter raised an interrogative eyebrow, concentrating no doubt on the possible meaning of the phrase. "I forget my English altogether now, madame."

"Parlour snakes! Why, when a gentleman makes his life-work out of handing out compliments to the ladies, and hanging round for what he can get, we call him a parlour snake."

"Perfectly, madame, I remember of course," he continued blandly. "No, Count Arkozi is not so. He is scarcely ever with ladies. Either he is with a gentleman or he reads a paper. I do not think he likes very well the

## Sweet Pepper

ladies except at the dances. I see him often at dances, when they make some amusement in a private room here, but only with the ladies of the aristocracy. He is of the best society and he does not go with the other sorts like most of the gentlemen. He is more fond of horses, I think. Coffee, madame? Certainly! Two Turkish! Very good, madame." He bowed himself away.

Glory had drawn conclusions of Jill's meeting with Count Arkozi and was in process of reforming her opinion of her.

"Say, Jill darlingest, I never got hold that you were a deep one. I sized you up as raw. I'd have thought that you'd have got as rattled as a school-girl if a man spoke to you without an intro. But you didn't exactly waste your time on the steamer, did you?"

"It wasn't like that at all. I can't explain to you exactly what happened because. . . . I wouldn't like you to think I was like that," Jill began, secretly rather pleased to be thought daring.

"No, darlingest hopefulest, we none of us ever are like that, only sometimes we get found out."

Thereafter for some time Glory continued to chaff Jill.

\* \* \* \* \*

Half an hour afterwards the head waiter came to Jill's side and said Count Arkozi sent his compliments to Miss Mordaunt and wished to know if he might take his coffee to her table.

Before Jill had had time to answer Glory had done so for her.

"Why, yes, say Miss Mordaunt has been just longing for him to come right up."

All at once Jill felt herself beginning to blush. It was not the first time that such a message had been brought to her table by a waiter. In Vienna she had received in this way notes, cards and even flowers from admirers whom she had not met; the bouquets coming usually from the Italian attachés, the notes from the French.

What embarrassed her on this occasion was that the

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message lent colour to what Glory had been saying. But her embarrassment was not unmingled with pleasure.

"Hope he'll bring his friend," Glory said.

I wonder if he will say anything about that evening on the boat, thought Jill, and began to wish she were not wearing her black felt hat; the brown one, that Glory had admired, suited her much better. However, she was satisfied with the black net dress, through the shoulders of which the yellow ribbons and the tinsel rosettes of the garment that Glory had given her, were just discernible. Besides, her hair had been waved that morning; which was something.

Must she introduce Glory to him or did one introduce the man to the woman? She could not remember. She would get confused if she worried about it, so to avoid thinking of the difficulty she lit a cigarette.

As she looked up from doing so Count Arkozi stopped by her side, and bowing slightly, shook hands with her.

"Good-evening, Mees Mordaunt, you are most kind that you permit me to come to your table. Will you please present me to your friend?"

As he shook hands with Glory he repeated his own name.

"You really permit?" he asked smiling, his hand on the vacant chair.

"Why, yes, I'm just glad to speak to a Hungarian. I'm crazy on Budapest and your gipsies, aren't I, Jill? It's good to have some one locally acquainted who could put one wise. I get tired of flinging around to find a proper restaurant and the best theatres," said Glory.

For a time the talk was of amusements in Budapest and Vienna, and though Glory and Jill preferred the Hungarian capital, Count Arkozi liked the larger city better.

He knew one as well as the other, he said, and though Vienna was less gay nowadays, perhaps, he thought of it always as it had been before the war, when his father had had an apartment there.

He had been at the Maria Teresa School in Wien, too,

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which was the most famous in the old Empire. He had gone there as a child and had stayed till he went to Cambridge.

Glory was delighted to hear that he had been at Cambridge: she just doted on Oxford and Cambridge, she said; though later it appeared likely that she had only been to the former University city and had thereupon "taken the other as read."

Jill did not take much part in all this, but she was able to study Count Arkozi more easily. He seemed more real now than he had on the steamer, when the atmosphere of reality had been too rarefied. She had thought of him then more as a materialized myth than as a man.

He had nice square shoulders, she thought now, and she liked his merry brown eyes, which seemed to make one laugh in sympathy. His serge tunic looked as if it had been cut in London, and was not too new. Hands were always important to her and his pleased her; they were strong, rather hairy: moreover he never used them to help his conversation, but with one he held the stem of an empty wine-glass, gazing quizzically into the play of light on the bowl of it. This, Jill found later, was a trick of his when trying to concentrate his mind on something difficult, like his present task of following Glory's rapid American phrases.

Presently, during a pause, Glory began rather ostentatiously to arrange the cherry stones on her plate.

"You and lil' Jill got acquainted on the steamer down from Wien, didn't you?" she asked without looking up and continuing to drill the stones on her plate.

"Oh, yes, we met on the ship, on the roof of it. It is nice to sit and watch that way down the river," Count Arkozi answered smilingly, and certainly realizing that Glory had hoped for other details.

"It must have been just too romantic for words . . . you two and the Blue Danube all to yourselves. Makes me quite jealous. And lil' Jill won't even tell me what you talked about. Quite a secret."

Count Arkozi, seeing that Glory's attention was still

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absorbed with the manœuvres on her plate, gave Jill a quick nod of gratitude.

"Oh we talked about Hungary," he said, "and about all things. I told her about the Bolsheviki and when they were here and how the Soviet House was this hotel."

"And after that I suppose you talked about whatever it is lil' Jill is so close about. Quite! Oh, yes! Quite! *Bien entendu! Gewiss!* and the rest of it! Well where I was leading to was that, as I've just taken notice of an American lady friend of mine, sitting down there, I'm going to leave you two young persons to get on with whatever you didn't get time to say on the steamer."

Glory pushed back her chair: it creaked warningly. I'm getting heavier again, she thought to herself. I'm getting older. She shivered and drained her liqueur glass before she rose. Count Arkozi was already standing and smiling at her. Glory let her cloak slip from her magnificent shoulders to the back of her chair.

"I'll leave it there to chaperone you and stage a fade-out myself," she said.

"Oh, don't go," said Jill, wanting to be alone with Count Arkozi but protesting from lack of self-confidence. "You could ask your friend to join us," she added.

"Oh, you wicked little humbug," laughed Glory over her shoulder, as she sailed away along the terrace. She was feeling very tired to-night, but she had got to brace herself to be Glory to yet another person to-night; and to do so before she reached the other table.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jill and Count Arkozi watched Glory threading her way between tables, accepting the attention she caused with just that slightest admission of conscious pleasure which is the gift of some American women. When Glory sat down, Jill was conscious of the return of interest to previous fields.

For a time she and Count Arkozi sat in silence, she because she wanted him to speak first, and he because he was framing sentences in a language he seldom used.

"I am so glad that I see you again," he commenced,

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"I was afraid that you do not stay here so long and that I do not see you again. I am only returned from the country to-day, where I was having much to do. My mother thinks she is ill, and I had to stop by her."

Jill made some polite inquiries about his family.

He was an only son and his mother, who was old, lived in the country near his property. He had one sister, but she was on her husband's estates in Transylvania, a vast province which had been Hungarian for a thousand years, but which the Peace Treaty had given to Roumania. Her husband had been murdered some six months before by a party of roving discharged Roumanian soldiers who had broken into the house to steal. The Roumanian Government would not give her a passport to come to Hungary, nor any one a visé to go to her, and as letters never got through, he only got very occasional news of her from refugees or friends who risked forcing the frontier. This had worried his mother very much and she often thought that she was ill, so he had to go and be with her.

His property was near the mountain of Tokay where the famous wine was made, and his vineyards were on the slope of it. He loved to live in the country very much.

"It is a very beautiful life," he said. "I ride nearly all the day and make the business with my farms. I have to go and see my peasants. There is very much to do. I am always out of doors. Sometimes I hunt in the woods that are not ver-ry far away and sometimes I fish, but the fishing is not good by me. In the evening I am ver-ry tired and I ride home.

"Then I sit by my house and listen to the voices of the peasants when they come home from their works. It is ver-ry still in the evening by my house, and in a farm some one plays on a wooden pipe we have that makes so deep and so sad music. On the Plain one can hear it very far."

He told her about the village outside the gates of his home. He did this like a child, describing things unrelated and without order and those that pleased him with many details. Though Jill afterwards learnt that

## The Faith of the Plains

he cared nothing for Art, he had the unconscious fondness for colour and mentioned the colours of most things he described. So, or by the gift that is called catching a likeness, he created in Jill's mind a very clear picture of the place and the hour.

She seemed to have known it all, as if in some previous life and, later, when she saw Hungarian villages, they were to her the one he had described; the long, thatched one-storey cottages with their whitewashed walls and festoons of golden maize cobs and green melons hanging under the eaves; the bright ornamentations about the doorways, the open sheds, where in the shadows one could see still the heavy wains and the pile of huge, ruddy pumpkins: the village well-head with its tall balancing pole, stark against the sky; the barefooted peasant women in their faded hundred-coloured dresses; the lean old men in embroidered sheep-skin; a young soldier in his scarlet cap; a goose girl and the geese, by the mirrored surface of the pond; a few slender poplars, motionless in the still air; the common leading to those vast level distances, and over it all the reluctant beauty of the evening.

"There are many trees round my house," he went on, "but to make a view from the rooms my father made an opening in them and one can see the sunset over the Plain. Always when I am by my home I sit and watch it. There is no one. The air does not move at all. The time when we were on the ship I tell you how ver-ry wonderful are our sunsets always in Hungary . . . I find it so beautiful."

He was speaking so softly that his lips were scarcely moving, and Jill could only just hear what he said.

"When the sun goes down and I am by my home it is the time of grand thoughts, and I think how I must live ver-ry well and make good things; that I must be more kind to my mother, who is old, and that I must think less of amusing myself."

"I do love that I am good, but I am not good at all, and I am sorry of it. And I think how I must be kind to my peasants, and think always of Hungary."



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"It is so sad now. You will not be able to understand it. They have taken away more than half of our country that we have made out of wild land a thousand years before.

"It is not as if they had taken your India or your Canada, which you have had only a little time. It is as if one takes of you the Kent or the Shires where are grass fields and the hedges and where I hunted ver-ry happily. It is so.

"What they took away is part of each of us; and because one can make nothing about it one grows so sad, sadder than when the *tziganes* play. One feels that there is nothing good any more and it is better that one amuses oneself and forgets, till one is dead.

"Sometimes I feel so, but I come by my house and I watch the sun go down from the Great Plain and the trees grow very dark before the sun, and there is stillness.

"Then I feel as we Hungarians must have felt always, and I know that it is not fine only to amuse oneself."

Jill watched him through her cigarette smoke. He looked so English and yet how different he was in some ways. An Englishman could not talk naturally about his inner feelings like this: he would feel awkward and ashamed. A Latin would have exaggerated and posed when he told her of such things, but Count Arkozi spoke with complete lack of self-consciousness like a child. She recognized, perhaps for the first time, the virtue of simplicity.

"We have suffered," he went on, "often before; and those times under the Turks, but in an end we made ourselves free.

"And when the sunset is come I know as certain as there will always be sunset that we must be free again. In an end we shall make it so, and shall have again the lands that have been taken away from us.

"Sometimes I think it may be in my time; sometimes I think it cannot be and that I cannot live to be so happy; but I know that that does not matter. I know that I am like a ver-ry little animal: I think this and that, but it is

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not important. Only that I am a little part of the people that are very sad but have a great heart, that is important.

"Do you feel sad things when you watch the sunset?"

Jill nodded. "Yes. Like that. . . . Go on," she said. She liked to hear new points of view.

"It is only important," he continued, "when I help a little and prepare and prepare, so that some day all the Hungarian lands may be free again. . . ."

When he ceased speaking, it took Jill a measurable space of time to recollect her surroundings and, when she did so, the room seemed crowded and the motives of those about her a little futile.

She was always easily affected by the enthusiasms of others and, never having passed through a stage of youthful cynicism, she had not tried to check the emotions which had risen in response to his earnestness. When he had halted for lack of a word she had joined in search of one, as if they had both been moved by the urgency of the same self-expression. In a way she had been helping him to explain, and so had come for the time to feel as he did.

The sudden return to the realm of the everyday dis-comforted them both: they avoided each other's eyes.

For a while he stirred his coffee in silence, then, feeling perhaps that to have expressed one's feelings was to have made oneself ridiculous, he added, "I am sorry that I talk so: it is not amusing: it is a bore."

Jill shook her head. She wanted to return to the world of ideas which they had just left, and she tried to induce him to talk again in the same vein, but she did not succeed.

When Glory, whose existence they had forgotten, returned, conversation flagged. People at the tables around had begun to leave, which further disturbed their train of talk, and presently they, too, rose to fetch their cloaks.

Outside the hotel in the crisp, wintry air they were bidding good-night when Count Arkozi said, "I want to arrange an amusement in this hotel for to-morrow night. Only myself and my friend who is dining with me to-night.

## *Sweet Pepper*

*I will be so happy if you will both come. We will meet at dinner at nine o'clock if you will. When the restaurant shuts we will go *separée* and we will have my favourite *tziganes* who will play to us till breakfast-time if you will stay . . . or longer; there is no reason to end an amusement till one is tired."*

"Oh let's," said Jill eagerly. Glory agreed and they all set off towards the Ritz.

In her room Jill thought of what she had heard that evening. What a strange world it was, of which she had again caught a glimpse. How dull and unromantic everything else seemed by comparison with it; a strange fairy-tale country where people still thought finely and lived fully; where one would not be worried by . . . and then for the first time that evening she remembered that in a few days she must leave it and return to London to look for work.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A Hungarian Night's Entertainment

ONE by one the lights had been extinguished, so that now the *separée* was lit only by a glimmer that filtered through the small, high windows from the forsaken restaurant, itself almost in darkness. The forms of things were still discernible but colour had faded into a restful monochrome.

There was no window on to the outer air, so that, even if the noise of the streets had not long ago been hushed, no sound from without could have reached the room: it seemed cut off from the world outside, as absolutely as if it were in the depths of a mine. There was indeed in the surrounding stillness some sensation of being far under the earth. The little furniture stood against the walls, so that the wide, polished expanse of the floor was bare; and the music of the *tziganes* filled and ruled the empty space.

For a long time no one had spoken nor moved. In this even twilight the music alone seemed to live: those who listened had merged their consciousness into it: it alone was articulate and they had become expressions of its mood. It existed and all else depended upon it. Time stood still. The present alone was real, the past was obliterated and the future no longer important.

To Jill it seemed as if she had been for infinite ages in the darkened room, that all life before had faded like some half remembered dream. She sat in a corner against the arm of a sofa, her legs tucked up under her, with Count Arkozi by her side. Neither had spoken for so long that she had lost the sense of individuality. In another part of the room were Glory and Major Zonay, Count Arkozi's

## Sweet Pepper

friend who the night before had been dining with him.

By each group were small tables, crowded with dark slender bottles of Leanyka and glasses, their bowls glistening in the gloom.

At the further end of the room, across the emptiness of the floor, were the six *tziganes*. The very loom of their black clothes was lost, everything, except their hands and faces. In this grey, filtered light, where all shadows were intensified, their expressions seemed tortured and wan-like visions of El Greco. In the darkest corner, some distance from the rest, a young man, whose skull-like Mongolian face alone caught the light, played the bass : two round, cropped heads of a sulky Turkish type bent over the 'cello and the many-stringed key-board of the zither : a white-haired old man with fiery eyes and a youth with the profile of a Red Indian crouched together, rocking slightly to the movement of their violins. And these faces, crude in this unearthly glimmer, were tense with the ecstasy of the same dreams.

On a stool a little in the foreground was a young man who had dined with their party and who was known as Pansi. He was sitting now with his head in his hands, his face hidden, listening to Koczi, the leader of the *tziganes*, who stood by his side and played to him. Every now and again Pansi would rouse himself, and with his hands before him and singing, almost under his breath would urge the gipsy to some further effort or different expression.

Jill had never considered herself as being particularly fond of music, but this seemed to have no relation to anything she had heard before : she had passed under its sway. There were no intervals here to break the spell, no glare of footlights, no disillusionment of a setting. In this twilight reality was forgotten : it had receded to dim distances, and she lived now in a new strange world of which she had never dreamt before. The music expressed things that she had always known, but could not even now have defined ; it intensified them and made them articulate. It woke in her emotions which, she felt, must

## A Hungarian Night's Entertainment

be old as the world, yet which she had not guessed that she possessed.

She stirred, and with half-closed eyes and parted lips, stretched herself in a new-found freedom of abandonment. There was no chilly daylight to make her ashamed of the intensity of her feelings. The vibrant gloom opened to her world after world of unexpected sensations. Queer ideas came to her, uncalled. The gods must feel like this, she thought, those older gods who more than men could taste the zest and bitterness of life.

\* \* \* \*

Count Arkozi had refilled the glasses. The soft yellow wine seemed to be one with the music ; it intensified, it did not deaden her sensibility.

The mood of the music changed, and it took to itself the slow rhythm of some waltz in a minor key. Pansi rose from his stool by the gipsies and asked her to dance.

They glided lightly through the gloom of the shadowed world, an effortless delight, as if they were floating through some still and remote part of space. Jill closed her eyes ; she had become part of the music, she felt. She and her partner had lost touch with the world.

When she opened her eyes Glory and Major Zonay were dancing too.

After a long while the mood of the gipsies changed again and they played some waltz she remembered from her childhood, sentimental airs that had seemed so pathetic when the nursemaid hummed them by the open window : they were songs of a passed decade : no one would ever thrill to them again, Jill would have thought, yet now the gipsies handled them tenderly, as if for the sake of what they had once meant.

Pansi began singing softly as they danced, " I wonder . . . who's . . . kissing . . . her now."

That could not be an old tune, not really : it had been one of Uncle Dan's favourites, she remembered, yet the period of the words seemed to Jill as dead as the music of the spinet.

She joined in the words, " I wonder if she . . . ever

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thinks about . . . me. . . . I wonder . . . who's . . . kissing her . . . now." A cheap enough theme, that in this new setting sounded plaintive enough, like those dusty love letters of long ago to which time has added a grace.

Pansi sang without any particular skill, keeping his words subservient to their steps. Dancing so, on this even empty floor in the soft twilight was no exertion : she could dance on like this for ever. Pansi was the most perfect partner she had ever known. He led her without her being conscious of it. She could not imagine that at any age he had not been able to dance, dancing must have been instinctive in him. He was perfect for this, though she was attracted by rougher types of men. He was tall and lithe ; his hair was dark, rather lank and apt to become untidy : he had a sensitive forehead and eyes, and though he was strong enough, she fancied him delicate.

The tunes changed, but they danced on. Glory and Major Zonay had tired and were sitting on the sofa with Count Arkozi : they were watching Jill and Pansi. The gipsies played some Viennese waltz tune of Jill's school-days and she began to sing.

"Now you are becoming quite Hungarian, I find," her partner whispered. "You like our amusements ?" Count Arkozi asked as she passed him.

"I simply love them all," she answered to the world.

"I could go on like this for ever," she thought to herself, and just then the door opened and the waiters entered with great trays of cold meats and fruits.

"It is necessary that we stop now to eat, or we will get tired," said Pansi. "If one makes dances all night one must eat and drink very much or one cannot be able to. If one drinks Leanyka and Tokay one will never be sad next day, but if you do not you will be so ill to-morrow that you will not want ever to make an amusement again. You must not be only half Hungarian. But never champagne or liqueurs, otherwise next day you will have a pain in your head."

With supper came more light and the *tziganes* retired to

## A Hungarian Night's Entertainment

the corridor for refreshment. Count Arkozi and Jill sat on a table, helping themselves from a huge tray of sandwiches. She looked round for some means of discovering if she was tidy and saw Count Arkozi and herself reflected in the mirror over the mantelshelf.

She was wearing a wide, flounced frock of pink net. She liked this material because it was cheap and easy to work. Luckily its prim, school-room stiffness suited her. It did not enter into competition with Glory's Paris models.

Jill's skirt, though shorter, was a little reminiscent of a crinoline. The early Victorian impression when she was sitting on a table with a childish display of stocking gave her an air of naughtiness. She pulled down her flounces and unconsciously spoilt the picture. Her loose, fair hair was in disarray. It was no use doing anything to it, she decided; anyhow it was still wavy. Her colour was bright from dancing: I'll pass, was her comment.

"How do you find our gipsies?" Count Arkozi asked her. "This one is Koczi Lajos. He is very young to have his orchestra, but his father, the old Koczi, was one of the great *tziganes* of my father's time. There are perhaps three of the grand old *tziganes* left now, and even they are not so good as their fathers, so the old gentleman at the Nemzeti Casino tells us. The *tziganes* of to-day are too much educated; they can read the music from books and they do not feel it so much. You have heard old Berkas, who plays at the Casino? Oh, he is a dear old man! A very great *tzigane*! He played always for our old King, the Emperor you call him. He knew our fathers and our grandfathers and our grandfathers' fathers. He is like a great aristocrat, as some of our old peasants are. He has the manners of a great noble. But you cannot understand how we feel about our gipsies, and I am not clever to explain. There are gipsies in every village and, when we are by our homes and would make amusement, we send for them to play. They do not play very well. If they do they go to the towns, and if they are still more good, to the clubs and the hotels in Budapest. If they



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are only second good they go often to Vienna or Paris. Most of the best *tziganes* are the sons of the great *tziganes*, not always but most.

*"They are to us like friends and yet like servants; perhaps they are most like a horse one is fond of. One has no shame before the gipsy and the gipsy does not play for this money or that. When one is rich one gives him much, too much; if one is very happy far too much; but when one is not one gives him what one can and he plays just as well if he likes one. When young men make some foolish things with women or drink too much, whatever is an amusement, the gipsy never grows familiar. Afterwards they will not only remember a thing like that, they will not speak of it first.*

"I can talk to this Koczi like to my brother, but he will always be like my dog. They are children. A gipsy who plays for one says, 'Please I get tired of being with different women, will you choose me a wife so that I do not make something foolish?' That is our gipsies.

"They should be rich, for when there is some big amusements we give them ver-ry much. I have seen young boys, who were a little foolish, put one hundred krownen notes in each violin of the gipsy who pleased them, till they had no more notes in their pockets. But the gipsies never save money.

"I will relate you something you should know. If a gipsy likes one and is with one often and see one in a restaurant where he plays, he will come to your table and play to you tunes that you like."

Jill told him that this had already happened to her.

"Oh, that is a compliment. The gipsies like the English ladies. If a gipsy does it again for you, you must drink his health and give him wine to drink yours. When they drink very well they play very well. It is when they begin to forget that they make the best playing; but even then they only play very well when they play to some one who can understand. If you are not sympathetic they cannot make their music so well.

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"Once when I was in Monte Carlo I hear some *tziganes* in a restaurant where I dine: ~~they~~ played most badly. One night when I have finished my dinner, I make a sign to the leader of them and when he comes to me, I say to him in Hungarian, 'Play me something.' He starts and I see that he is ashamed that he is played so badly. Then he begin to play so as he never had that winter. He was playing our music, the ver-ry, ver-ry old tunes that were made when we struggled against the Turk. He knew I understood and he played so well that people talked and the restaurant was full each night.

"When a *tzigane* comes to you next time you must tell him a tune you wish him to play."

"But I don't know the names of any Hungarian tunes, and he would not understand if I told him names of English ones," Jill said.

"One does not need to tell a *tzigane* the names," Count Arkozi answered. "One begins to sing to him. I will show you."

"Oi-eee, Lajos," he called.

The leader of the gipsies came into the room smiling, his violin under his arm. He was not more than twenty-four or twenty-five, his cheeks had not yet lost the contour of youth. His face was inclined to a heavy and sensual cast but he had sensitive eyes.

"His dark hair grows prettily. He is a little like the naked boy in the 'Borachos,'" Jill thought.

Count Arkozi, turning over, reached for a full glass and handed it to her. "Give it to Koczi," he said.

The gipsy took the glass from her, bowing with easy politeness.

"Now drink to him," prompted Count Arkozi.

Jill lifted her glass and sipped. "I shall get tipsy if I drink so much," she thought.

The gipsy raised his glass and bowing, set it on the table. Then he drew two warning notes from his violin and waited while his orchestra trooped into the room. A waiter refilled the glasses, moved the trays to another table and extinguished the lights, so that, except for a

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thin beam that poured through the door, left ajar, the room was again in darkness.

Count Arkozi touched Jill's arm and said something in Hungarian to Koczi who stood before them, though his orchestra had arranged themselves as before at the further end of the room.

"He will make English tunes for you," he told her.

The gipsy fitted his violin under his chin and his eyes on Jill, began a strange rendering of "I'm afraid to go home in the dark." He passed without a pause to other tunes she knew, his orchestra following after the first few notes.

As he played he drew nearer and nearer, holding her with his soft smiling eyes. She became a little ill at ease and was glad that her face was in darkness. What light there was fell from behind her upon the floor. She saw the shadow of her head upon his white shirt.

"He is rather beautiful and yet a little repulsive," she thought, and remembered Nijinski in "*L'après-midi d'un faune*." The gipsy played a few bars strange to her, and then realizing that she did not know the tunes stopped as if for an inspiration.

"Sing some tune you like him to make. He is playing most well to-night, I find. He likes you, otherwise he would not be able to make it so. They only make it well if they like you, our gipsies."

Jill hummed a tune but Koczi shook his head.

"He will learn it most easily in some minutes," Count Arkozi whispered to her.

Jill smiled in answer, but began to whistle "Arizona." Koczi nodded at once, like a child proud of its knowledge, and began the tune. He played it very slowly, throwing into it a sense of yearning that translated it into something quite else, into Hungarian perhaps, Jill thought. She wondered to what words he would have set it to.

"I find him most excellent now," whispered Count Arkozi.

As the gipsy played he drew nearer and nearer to her, his eyes fixed on hers.

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If he moves any nearer he will touch me, she thought. It would be rather thrilling but horrible if he did, she realized and shivered. She drew herself further on to the table and lay back on her elbow.

"Ask him to play something gay now," she said to relieve the tension which existed in her, "I shall get depressed if he plays so many sentimental tunes."

Count Arkozi said something to Koczi who, after a warning note to his orchestra, passed on to some topical English tune, and Jill, to relieve her feelings, began to sing. Every one except Major Zonay, who did not speak English, joined in the chorus. There followed several popular airs, each of which some one at least was able to sing, and Jill soon forgot her recent discomfiture, so that when Koczi stopped, waiting for some one to suggest another tune, she began a coon song she had sometimes sung at village concerts in the old days. The gipsy took up the accompaniment.

When she had finished Koczi congratulated her in Hungarian in such a simple, friendly way that she felt that she had been foolish to have been abashed by him: his eagerness to please was childlike.

Gipsies were evidently different, and one should feel different about them and not think of them as men at all. She had been too readily defensive—lack of *savoir faire*, she concluded.

Koczi asked her a question which Count Arkozi translated. Would she sing the same tune again and he would accompany her better. Glory began to ring an empty wine-glass and called for an encore. She was getting wound up, she said. Koczi, without waiting for an answer, began the opening bars and Jill, with spirits rising higher and higher, slid off the table and began to sing.

It must be the wine, passed through her brain, though she felt still sober.

"On the table," shouted Glory.

Major Zonay asked what the words meant and joined her in French, German and attempts at English. Count Arkozi offered his hand to help her mount the table.

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This will never do, she thought, and twisting herself free with a quickness that surprised them both, she began to dance. At home she had always ended her turn with a dance and now she began to do so lightly and well, singing a bar here and there in imitation of a coon's voice. Koczi was delighted and kept calling appreciations to her.

When she had finished and had refused to repeat the performance, Count Arkozi, calling to the gipsies to continue the same tune, coming to Jill, began to dance with her a one-step which grew more and more fantastic. He brought into it all sorts of stage steps some of which she knew and some of which she could not follow at all. He was not as graceful a dancer as Pansi, but he was clever at all sorts of amusing steps.

"This is fun, do you often dance like this?" she panted as they whirled dangerously between two glass-laden tables.

"Not often. I dance so in Vienna sometimes when we make an amusement. Here too. But here we dance ball-room dances and *czardas*, that is the national dance."

He offered to teach it to Jill, and she quickly accepted. That would be one up on Janet and Kitty. There had always been a rivalry in dancing between the sisters.

At the end of the dance they came to a halt in the corner by Glory. Count Arkozi turned to her. "Miss Mor-daunt is going to learn a Hungarian dance," he said. "Major Zonay must teach you too. We will make a dancing school."

But Glory, who owed her success partly to knowing which were and which were not her strong points, could not be induced to rise.

Count Arkozi, placing himself opposite Jill and at arms' length, put a hand on each side of her waist and told her to take hold of his shoulders: then as the music started they commenced a series of what appeared to Jill shuffles successively to left and right. There followed other movements sometimes dancing separately and opposite each other, sometimes whirling round with arms across

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each other's shoulders and facing in different directions.

Jill could not distinguish the various movements of the dance and after a few minutes gave up. Then, to show her how it should be done, Pansi and Count Arkozi danced the *czardas* together, Count Arkozi dancing as a woman with a waiter's apron twisted round him as a skirt. He acted very well the part of a self-conscious peasant girl whose shyness gradually melts. Glory rocked with laughter. Some of the steps when the dancers passed each other and stamped, seemed to Jill like Spanish dances she had seen, but as the speed of the music increased, the movements grew more and more rapid and excited, till the men swung round dazzlingly.

There was something maddening in the music itself. Jill, standing near, swayed this way and that to it. Major Zonay came to her side.

"We must dance too," he said.

"I thought you didn't want to dance as you didn't just now," she said.

"I dance only the *czardas* easily now," he answered. "Once I dance very much, but since what has happened in these six years I do not care to dance very much. . . . Only when I hear *czardas* then . . . will you try with me?"

His voice was still gruff, but the tones were less dry. Jill faced him, stirred by the music.

He is rather alarming and rather splendid, she thought.

She turned and glanced at him quickly. Sitting on the sofa he had appeared angular and out of his proper element, but standing, tall, spare and long-limbed in his bright blue and silver-frogged uniform, he was magnificent, if still frigid and a little inhuman, to her mind. She admired rather than liked his sharp, controlled features. His wavy fair hair, which was so dry yet which she could not imagine was ever disarranged, gave her a creepy feeling: it did not seem alive. She had never seen a man who looked more resolute. He seemed indifferent to other people, almost unconscious of them. She wondered if he had ever cared for a woman. He must have been

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very aloof and frightening as a lover. One would never have an idea of what he was thinking.

He took her arm and they commenced to dance. Jill, who was quick to copy anything, once she had seen it, was more successful this time. The music grew faster and faster. Her partner swung her round at an increasing rate: as a dancer he was accurate and mechanical. The speed began to make her uneasy. She wondered what would happen if he let her go. Would she slither across the floor or crash into the furniture? She would not be able to save herself. She would not very much mind what happened!

Some of the lights had been turned on and the head waiter was in the doorway watching. Glory was still lying back in her chair: for once she was not directing the course of events. She looked tired and older, Jill thought, and also a little "out of it." She could not compete in this physical exuberance. For the first time Jill realized that Glory was nearly a generation older than herself. She had become a chaperone. Jill felt sorry for her, but could do nothing.

Pansi and Count Arkozi were executing some complicated steps which seemed like a Russian dance. They were both very excited and out of breath: a long stray lock of dark hair hung over Pansi's forehead. They dipped and sprung with the exaggerated agility of marionettes. She, too, was spinning round and round. The idea of a film being turned too fast occurred to her: she laughed aloud and caught her breath. Her partner shouted out something to her that she did not understand. She wondered if she could explain to him in French, the idea of the film being wound too quickly, but she did not try.

The dance demanded all her attention and strength: she was getting tired and a little giddy. Koczi, swaying to the mad spirit of his music, hovered close by, so close that she wondered how he avoided a collision. The rest of his orchestra had drawn nearer and stood forming a half circle behind him, fencing in the dancers between

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themselves and the wall. Each gipsy was as intent on the dance as if he were taking part in it. They smiled and grimaced : the fiery-eyed old man with white hair, who played second fiddle, sparkled with gaiety : the tall, emaciated youth with the Mongolian face wagged his head this way and that, as he rocked about his huge bass. Every one had gone mad, Jill thought : every one rocked and swayed : the walls swung and rocked. A small table, laden with glasses, crashed to the floor and the head waiter dashed across the room and drew the other table into safety. Jill stepped on some snapping fragments of glass.

It was like being carried by some irresistible wind. The music grew faster. I cannot move any quicker whatever the music does, she decided, I know I cannot. She had reached a point where she felt that she would fall, when, in a wild finale, the music stopped and she let herself drop upon the sofa. For a time she lay trying to master her breathlessness and without reason found herself holding back sobs : she caught her breath painfully, she was utterly worn out, physically and emotionally.

A new world ! New exhilarations and exhaustions ! She was used up, yet satisfied. She shut her eyes and the music which had begun again seemed to come from far away . . . far away and very long ago. Time drifted darkly past her, backwards and forwards, this way and that. Presently it was still : time had stopped. Existence had become as the slow drip of water . . . in the distance.

\* \* \* \* \*

After a long while she sat up. The room was in half darkness again : the debris of broken bottles had been swept away and there were fruit and filled glasses on a table by her side.

Koczi, standing near, was playing some Hungarian rhapsody. The other gipsies had faded again in the remote shadows. Count Arkozi, by her side, was dreamily absorbed in the music. Pansi was seated on the floor at her feet, his thin hands supporting his chin and his



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elbow, which rested on the sofa, pressed against her knee. He was evidently as oblivious of the contact as she had been: he was intent only on what Koczi was playing to him. His profile was turned to her, and looking down at him, Jill admired him, as she would some child. He was a nice-looking boy. She liked his thoughtful eyes and his sensitive mouth. They must have been nearly of an age, but she felt absurdly older than he.

Glory, deep in her chair, lay very still: perhaps she slept. Major Zonay, stiff and straight-backed, his elbows on the table, sat emotionless as a figure in a wax-works. He might have been a Hussar of the Napoleonic era, frozen in some Russian ice drift and still unchanged.

Jill wondered what o'clock it could be. Glory, the only link with even the near past and the outside world, was unconscious. All the others were under the spell of the music. It seemed to Jill as if she and these others, who watched, were in some way lost in the pit of the night: as if time had forgotten them: as if they might sit on like the enchanted in a legend, listening to this music for ever. The passing of the hours had no longer a meaning. This music had become the measure of all things and time and reality were absorbed by it.

The music did not deal even with any human emotions, but with things older and more elemental. It was like the music of the wind that was before man and shall be after him: wistful or stirring. It murmured of the Spring-time in lonely places: it lamented the dying year: sometimes it was like the rollick of falling leaves: sometimes it was the winter gale glorying in its strength: it was wild, ancient, untameable.

Koczi, dim and pale, was as one in a trance. His personality slept and through him the music expressed itself. Pansi's chin had dropped on his chest. Count Arkozi had closed his eyes; his parted lips showed the clear white line of his teeth.

The music, nothing else, mattered: it was life, calling to her. Jill turned on her side and covering her face with

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her elbow surrendered herself to it. When it was sad she held her breath to keep herself from sobbing. Later it brought the furious exultation of leaping flames at night: she tightened her every muscle . . . so hours passed uncounted. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

The party was breaking up: lights were turned on and two tired young waiters hung about the doors. Pansi, with his soft shirt very crumpled and his tie awry, was muffling himself in a silk scarf and was munching a sandwich. Glory, grey faced and haggard, fidgeted with her furs, while Jill watched Count Arkozi and Major Zonay whom she could see through the still-room door. They were settling the bill with the head waiter. Major Zonay, in a long military overcoat, looked taller than ever: Count Arkozi wore his chocolate-coloured cloak and a very tall Austrian *kepi*. Jill had not noticed before that his hair grew a little lower down his cheeks than was usual. Seen in profile and framed by the doorway, he looked like a portrait of some soldier of other times.

The room was chilly. It was full of the subtle, stale smell that follows dissipation. Jill shivered and passed into the corridor. There she was faced by a sideboard, covered with dirty plates and empty bottles; ten, twenty, thirty, forty, more, more. "Could we have drunk all that?" she thought. Glory joined her and they moved towards the hall where they waited for the men.

Two charwomen on their knees were scrubbing the floor: the night porter behind his counter was drinking coffee. Jill shut her eyes and tried to keep her mind blank: the reaction from the emotions of the night was not pleasant.

The men appeared and they all passed outside. In the street dawn had broken and the air was frosty and fresh: some short-skirted peasant women in Russian boots hurried past them, carrying towering loads of vegetables strapped on their backs.

Glory, Major Zonay and Pansi, with a short leather coat over his dinner jacket and his hands in his side

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pockets, hurried ahead. They had chosen the quickest way back to the Ritz.

"Let's go by the river," Jill said, and she and Count Arkozi turned on to the Embankment. The roadway and pavements were deserted, but on the quay below labourers were unloading the barges. The Danube, cold, blue and ruffled by the morning breeze, was still in shadow, but on the further bank the frowning hill of old Buda caught the first sunlight: the rays glowed on the warm tints of the ancient houses and glinted on the domes of the Imperial Palace, clear and immense against the cloudless sky.

The cool morning breeze played about her: it was like cold water passing over her body. This chilly morning was just the right antidote she needed after the long night hours.

They reached the Ritz too soon, so instead of passing round to the door of the hotel, they waited for a little, leaning on the railings and watching the river. A company of soldiers marched by, wearing their short grey winter jackets edged with fur, and hood-like steel helmets: the officer riding in front was muffled to the eyes. When they had passed Jill sighed. "I must go in," she said.

They reached the door of the Ritz and shook hands.

"I must relate to you something," Count Arkozi began. "It is not fair that I do not tell you. When you slept in the night I wanted you and I kissed you."

Jill nodded. She was too tired to care. The night that had just ended seemed so infinitely distant that things that might have happened then did not seem to matter now. He had kissed her: she ought to mind. She was very tired.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I shall see you at dinner to-night, perhaps?" he asked as she backed through the turn-stile door. Jill nodded absent-mindedly and passed through into the hall. How tired she was!

## BOOK II



## CHAPTER I

### Virtue in the Scales

**G**LORY and Mr. Paint had left Budapest the day before and Jill sat alone in the drawing-room of the Ritz. Luncheon was over and a few groups of people in the room were finishing their coffee and liqueurs. She, too, sipped slowly a wine-glass of the renowned Turkish coffee, but she had not lunched, for she had determined to do without one meal each day so as to be able to prolong her stay in Budapest, or rather to delay her return to London.

Now that Glory had gone she had no one to talk to and consequently she brooded more and more upon the difficulties that would await her there. That morning in her bedroom, she had found herself envying the little maid who cleaned the bathroom and whom she had watched for a while. The girl was obviously peasant: her green cotton dress was clean but coarse: a handkerchief was tied round her head and she was bare-legged. As she worked she crooned softly to herself one of those endless Magyar songs. No doubt she was the lowest grade of servant in the hotel and had to work hard, early and late, but she was certain of being housed and fed. If she were not able to get work at the hotel she would find some elsewhere: she had no fear of finding herself one day with an empty purse, no work and no idea of how to earn her next meal and night's lodgings. She was expert at something and, as long as her strength lasted, she had a definite value in the world.

Jill frowned and clenched her fingers, as she sipped her coffee. Of course if she were really starving, she could go to Aunt Mary, she supposed, but the very idea made her shiver. Aunt Mary always asked unpleasant questions

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and made Jill feel very conscious of how much she disapproved of her brother, Jill's father, and how unwelcome his children were at her house. She invited each of them to lunch once every summer and every winter; asked questions in a patronizing way; never mentioned their mother; gave them platitudinous advice and sometimes ten shillings.

Yes, she would have to go there if she were starving, but it would be preferable only to the workhouse. She wondered what Aunt Mary would say if she had arrived at her house in South Street and announced that she had not a penny in the world to bless herself. She would be ushered by the faintly hostile butler into the expensive drawing-room, so tidy in spite of being overcrowded with ornaments: she would be shown into the back part of the room, where stood the piano and the least comfortable sofa, and in winter an electric radiator. This, she and her sisters supposed, was to show that as relations they were not on the same footing as other guests, who were shown into the front part of the room, where were the comfortable chairs, the fire, the flowers sent up from Somersetshire and the best of Aunt Mary's collection of Lowestoft china.

Yes, she would be left in that back room for a long while, not having courage enough to establish herself in the front part of it. It was Aunt Mary's habit to keep her waiting. Then she would hear the silk petticoats rustling down the stairs, that aggravatingly complacent sound, her Aunt's hard, high voice, giving directions to a housemaid: she usually managed to arrange a conversation just outside the door.

What would Aunt Mary's line be, if she arrived destitute at South Street? Jill could imagine her lips, bitten to invisibility, her blue grey eyes widely hostile. Would her still handsome face flush or grow grey like her hair? Certainly the thin hands, with the emerald rings, would grip the arms of the French chairs, as they always did when her Aunt was angry.

One would get a meal out of it, Jill supposed; or would Aunt Mary give one a shilling to buy something to eat and

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tell one to come back after tea. Aunt Mary would spend the afternoon consulting with her friends, her advisers as she chose to call them; and afterwards there would be another interview. In the end an unexpectedly inhuman form of charity would be propounded.

Oh no, Aunt Mary's would be better than suicide, but the workhouse would be better than Aunt Mary's! How did one get into the workhouse? Would a policeman know where the nearest one was? Tramps were supposed to have to break stones or chop wood for a night's lodging.

Jill lit a cigarette and sat back. Really, eating no lunch made no difference at all!

Across the room the Necker Baby and the Czristincovitch, the two most renowned cocottes, sat together, smoking Turkish cigarettes as long as pencils, these being a newly imported luxury and preposterously dear.

The Necker was wrapped in a fur coat with a collar so immense, that her small impudent head was almost lost in it, but her kilted skirt was very short and displayed her crossed knees. She had very pretty legs, Jill thought, but she did not like the transparent stockings nor the open-work shoes. The Czristincovitch wore black satin, long black gloves, and a picture hat. She was large-boned but elegant and still looked aristocratic, whereas the Necker seemed, by comparison, a *gamine* in sables. Sitting together they were like a Borzoi and a French toy bull-dog.

The clothes and airs of the cocottes always interested Jill. One could not help liking the Necker. She could not imagine that any combination of circumstances could put the Necker out of countenance. She always managed to rise to some suitable repartee: no blow of fate would be able to break her spirit: the Necker would never be "down."

Jill had heard something of her history. She was a "character" now and, though she was still young, she had established her position; had won her way to it by indomitable courage and in spite of her freaks of wilfulness. One could imagine that she had starved sometimes but not that she had asked a favour of any one.



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Watching her now, Jill realized how much more bravely the Necker would face the future that she herself dreaded. The Necker would have the necessary doggedness and assurance. If, like Jill, she wanted a post, she would walk into any office and demand to see the manager and would ask for it as one asks a casual question of a friend. If she were refused, she would still leave the room with the honours of the encounter on her side : she would swagger out with her little chin in the air and the set, bull-dog smile on her lips : . . . she would go away and try elsewhere. Oh, yes, she would get work without any qualifications at all except her impudence.

The Necker was confident, in an almost American way : that was what it was ; and she herself was not, Jill realized. She would never be able to carry off matters in the way the Necker could. The Necker would almost be a match for Aunt Mary ! If the Necker were in her place she would somehow get that six hundred pounds needed to start the chicken farm, out of Aunt Mary herself. Oh yes, she would get it, even if she had to sit on the door-step in South Street and proclaim Aunt Mary's meanness to the world.

If one were like Aunt Mary and didn't mind hurting other peoples' feelings, or if one was like the Necker and had no feelings to hurt and did not mind making scenes, then one could get what one wanted in the world : otherwise one had to be born possessing it, or go without. It did seem horribly unfair, horribly. It was not as if Aunt Mary or the Necker were better than herself. She felt certain that her Aunt's character was worse than her own, mean, ill-natured, selfish. . . . One could not tell, of course, what she had been like at her own age, Jill realized, but Aunt Mary had had an easy life, indulgent parents, had never had to work, and somehow had managed to inherit a larger share of the family fortunes than her brothers. She could have married had she wished to. She had had everything. Yet now she was a selfish, self-important old maid, without kindness.

Really the Necker seemed the pleasanter of the two.

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Of course her choice of profession must have been a sad blow to the respectable old professor, her father, but though Jill had heard many stories about her, there had not been one that showed her as unkind or self-complacent : most of them had displayed her as a rather good-natured dare-devil.

Jill looked out of the window. The birds were singing in the acacia trees ; beyond, sunlight glittered on the river ; everything seemed happy. . . . A week more, or a fortnight at most, and she must return to London and start that search for work. She bit her lip at the thought of it.

If only some one like the Necker Baby could take her place and go to London, to find employment for her ; then once a position was secured she could go and fill it. She could hold it. Oh how hard she would work ! She would not think of anything else. She would do anything to escape that search for employment. If only she and the Necker Baby could change places for a time, a few months. If the Necker could go to London and find work, and she could stay in Budapest. . . .

Jill suddenly stiffened in her chair as on the brink of a chasm. . . .

God ! . . .

For a minute or two she kept her mind deliberately empty and stared at a dusty sunbeam. It was a pleasure of which she never tired : it left no regrets. It was so hard to imagine that in some countries there could be too much sun. She had never had enough of it and, in London, there was less, much less than in Vienna or in Budapest. . . . It was probably raining in London now : the streets would be all shiny and one would not be able to get a seat in a 'bus or find shelter. Of course in summer it was better, but it was not really Spring-time yet and when she got back to London the weather would still be wretched.

How discouraging it would be : just when she would want all the cheerfulness she could muster. If there was a blue sky and sunlight, she would be in good spirits and

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would feel braver for the ordeal of asking for work. Summer would have been much easier: summer was cheaper: one did not have to spend so much on food or being warm, it was an expensive luxury in winter but cost nothing in summer.

The colder one was the less courage one had. Zero hour! How miserable it would be, when one was dispirited from walking in the damp, chilly streets to have to ask for work, like a favour. She imagined the squish-squash inside her damp shoes as she walked into the office and the general chilly atmosphere of her clothes, as she waited to be interviewed. Then when the door of the manager's office opened. . . . Oh, she wished some one could undertake that task for her. Afterwards she would not mind doing the work, however hard. Oh no! if only some one with the assurance and the irrepressibility of the Necker could change places with her for a few weeks and if she herself. . . .

Again! This would never do! She cleared her mind again and watched the waiter, who, at the end of the room by the sideboard, was arranging a vast variety of liqueurs on the shelves. She tried to distract her thoughts by wondering what his history could have been before he became a waiter. The room was now almost empty, and having nothing to do, his professional expression relaxed. He was of large build, thirty perhaps, with cropped, dark hair and a dull, patient face of the Slav type: his mouth suggested incapacity and misfortunes of a sort. In spite of his clothes and occupation, the air of being a countryman from a remote district hung about him. Jill chose to suppose that the small farm or shop, which he had inherited from more capable and thrifty parents, had been ruined by the war and that, at the end of his military service, he had found himself without support. He had been an officer's groom and this recommendation and his height, had secured him his present work. Now standing there, he looked vaguely discontented with his position, yet afraid of losing it. Perhaps he was dreaming of the little homestead and the little field of sweet maize and the

## Virtue in the Scales

Great Plain stretching on for ever and ever. He was another victim of the war, like herself, she thought.

At this moment the waiter stiffened himself, scurried across the room to the Necker Baby, and fetched her a box of the monstrous cigarettes. They cost twelve hundred crowns for a box of twenty-five, Jill knew; that was fifteen shillings in English money to-day, and would have been more than fifty pounds before the war. But of course the Necker could afford luxuries and they were, in a way, an advertisement, and as such might produce a profit. She could afford almost anything she could find to buy in Budapest, Jill thought. It was said that she had received money at the rate of two thousand pounds a year from her former admirer.

With the exchange as high as it was, she could not, even if she tried, spend more than one pound a day on food and cab fares. Jewelry she would get as presents. What could she possibly spend on dress? Four hundred? Oh no, eight hundred! But Jill doubted if so much could be spent on dress in Budapest, except by buying frocks in ridiculous numbers, and the Necker did not seem to have any great variety of these. No, say five or six hundred! She could not spend more than one thousand a year. She would have another thousand which she would not know what to do with.

Jill watched her open her box of cigarettes and refuse the match that the waiter proffered. She had just the manner of a naughty little street urchin as she struck a match herself and lit the cigarette. Of course she would not do anything like any one else! "What an oddity she was," Jill thought.

A thousand pounds a year; that would be nearly one hundred pounds a month. Why, if she were the Necker she could save in six months enough to make the chicken farm possible; the chicken farm that would mean security for life . . . no anxious searching for work . . . no mortifying failure to find it, no fear of losing it, no indignities.

## Sweet Pepper

At the chicken farm she would be reasonably free and could mix with the sort of people of her own birth . . . and the six hundred could be saved in six months! . . . if only she were the Necker . . . or if. . . .

Her mind became thronged with conflicting ideas. The waiter approached and took away her coffee tray without her noticing it.

Six hundred pounds in six months! . . .

The thought of looking for work in London had haunted her with increasing insistence for more than a month, but it was not till now that she realized how overwhelming was her dread of the prospect. She was shocked, not so much by the possible alternative, as by the fact that she had allowed it to present itself to her.

Was she . . . ? Were other girls . . . ? Was every one . . . ?

She had always considered herself . . . she grew frightened of what she was capable of contemplating. . . . Aunt Mary's niece allowing such ideas to enter her head!

There was something comic in the idea of Aunt Mary's niece! She thought of Aunt Mary's expression if . . .

Her mental angle altered, and her thoughts changed their direction.

When she looked up again the Necker and her companion had gone and the room was empty.

## CHAPTER II

### On the Brink

**T**HAT afternoon when Jill was having tea Count Arkozi called. He had not seen her since the night of the "amusement" and not knowing that Glory had left, he had come to ask her and Jill to dine with him that evening. When he heard that Glory had gone, he asked Jill if she would dine alone with him: he hoped that it would not be too unconventional; but he knew that English girls were more free and could do things that would be impossible for those of other nations.

Jill had been for a long walk and had shaken off the depression she had felt in the early afternoon, but she was afraid that it might return in the evening when she was alone, so accepted gladly the invitation.

As she dressed for dinner she wondered how Count Arkozi felt towards her. The night of the "amusement" he had kissed her while she slept. She had not known till afterwards and then she had been too tired and worn out to care much about anything. Why had he told her? Had he done so to hear what she would say? He was odd! She had gone straight to bed and slept till lunch-time, when she had been awakened by Glory, very excited, having just received a letter calling her to Paris. All that afternoon Jill helped her with her packing and had been too busy to think of much else: besides she had still been suffering from the mental exhaustion that followed her first Hungarian entertainment. Her brain had seemed heavy, she had been conscious of her body but her sensibility had been numbed, and she had been glad, for otherwise Glory's departure would have depressed her more than it did.

## Sweet Pepper

She had meant to tell Glory at dinner about the kiss, but Mr. Paint had dined with them, so when she had undressed she had crept into Glory's room. Glory was already in bed and the room was in darkness, so that she had felt more at ease, when she had told her of the incident.

"What do you think he could have meant?" she had asked. Glory had had no definite views. She did not know Hungarians and their point of view, but she was sure that Jill's best course would be to behave as if nothing had happened, and to wait and see. He might have meant a lot; he might have meant nothing; he might have kissed her on the spur of the moment; he might have told her for various reasons.

How did Jill feel towards him? that was the important thing: was she at all fond of him?

"No no," Jill had said. She liked him very well. He was jolly and full of high spirits, but. . . . Oh no. . . . nothing like that. How did she feel about him? It was hard to say. At first she had thought of him only as strange, rather romantic. Why had she thought him romantic? Oh, when they had first met on the river. . . . Oh, no she did not mean not being introduced, but there had been something that she had not told Glory, that she had promised not to tell any one. . . . but then she had never expected to meet him again. And he had seemed so romantic to her afterwards that it would have spoiled things if she had told any one about what had happened. That was why she had not done so. It would not really have mattered, she supposed. But, when she had met him again, he was quite changed, or she saw a different side of him. . . . that must have been it. . . . because she was still always conscious that that other side of him was there. That was one of the reasons she would not have cared to let herself like him too much: for she felt he had been only playing when he was with her: not playing with her, she did not mean that, but the sort of life Glory and she had seen him living was only a diversion. She always felt that he was waiting till something else, the

## On the Brink

other side of him, the real side, called him back. Then he would go away and forget everything : he could not be held. It was as if . . . one could not explain such ideas properly. . . . Oh, as if he were on holiday from his real life. If she were to fall in love with any one, she would expect to be their only interest. Oh, she knew it might not last, but she would have to be the great factor in his life for the time being. With Count Arkozi nobody could ever be that : there would be always something else even when he was mad and danced like he did that night. Then he was not good-looking, or anyhow he was not her idea . . . she preferred tall, thin men. Major Zonay was too old and not a bit sympathetic . . . but he had more the . . .

Glory thought him a hopeful-looking young man, but with men it was a question of what could be done with them, in Jill's case marriage. Did Jill want to marry a foreigner ?

Jill did not know : perhaps. . . . Anyhow she was certain that Count Arkozi was not thinking of such a thing. She did not mean that he was thinking of anything bad ; only she was certain that he would not marry or not till he was quite old. He had other things. . . . Oh, she could not explain, but by instinct she knew it. There would always be something else that would prevent him from marrying. Oh, no, it wasn't an intrigue or a tie of that sort. It was something that she knew a little about but must not repeat.

Glory was not much given to reticence. She did not like it in others and she was impatient and also a little tired. She liked Jill and she wanted to be sympathetic, but she would have to make an early start next morning, and she wanted to get a good night's rest.

If Jill was sure that it would not end in marriage, she had said, it was not worth while thinking twice about him or why he had kissed her. He had done it and that was all there was to it, anyway. Men were all right to flirt with, but it was best to wait for that till one was married and fixed. It did not do girls much good, but as for



## Sweet Pepper

getting wrought up about a man. . . . Oh, she had no patience with that. Some girls would make a paper hoop out of the ten commandments and jump through them, just to amuse a fellow ; but not Glory.

One must look at such things from a business point of view ; what did one stand to lose ; what did one stand to gain ? It was not pretty, but life was not . . . not often. It was a business world, and a girl had got to stick to business lines if she wanted to make good. If a man had money enough, he might be worth marrying ; as long as he did not look a poop, or went to bed with his spurs on, or wetted his nose in his drinks. But except that men could help one, her straight talk to young women was, don't worry with them.

" Lil' Jill," she had said, " I'd just love to throw my rice and used-up Louis Quinzes after your brougham, and if it's that you're after, I can tell you what's a golden rule, nine out of ten times. If you want a man to marry you, be just what he expects a girl to be, but be it just out of reach . . . not too far, mind you, or he may hoist his Stetson and sail off ; as near as you can without letting him get his claws in. Any fool will tell you the " just out of reach " ; it was a stale game when Genesis got written, but my gift to girls' knowledge is . . . if you're set on a man, be just what he expects a girl to be. Men don't want Melisande on the moonlit terrace, leastways they don't marry them often ; they want Peggy on the tennis lawn, right here and now. Find out what he expects a woman to be ; not his ideal, because what he thinks is his ideal, he borrowed out of a magazine or a verse book.

" Try to be just what he thinks women are. Very likely he'll expect girls are all cats, or sort of purring kittens. He mayn't really like that sort. but you be it. It kind of flatters his vanity. . . . ' There I told you so,' he'll say, ' I knew I was right about them.' And he'll feel that good that he'll propose right there.

" It's funny, but most people like to find things as they expected them to be. Two hoots for the charm of the unexpected ! It isn't a paying proposition. They expect

## On the Brink

ink in an inkpot, and if they find *caviare*, they won't eat it and say thank-you: they'll start cussing because it clogs the pens and won't write clear.

"I'm not trying to hand out small talk. It's true. Look here, Jill, I'm off to-morrow: very likely I shan't ever see you again. I'd just like to think you'll be happy. You asked me the other night how to make money: I couldn't tell you. I don't know; but I can tell you how I got on. I was just what people expected me to be. I was naughty with the gay old men; I was dreamy with the boys, with just a sigh here and there, because they liked to think there is something, away inside me, that isn't satisfied. I'm what people expect me to be. They think that as I'm an American I've got to talk like a cowboy in O. Henry: so I do. Why, I used to talk English almost as good as you once, but I found it was not wanted. I've sat up at nights sometimes, thinking out new Americanisms. Honest! I'm pretty used to it now, of course, and it isn't much trouble.

"Jill, little one, I've only talked all this about myself to-night, because I want you to remember, remember . . . remember, remember. . . . Be what each person expects you to be. And when it's a man be it, just out of reach. No woman ever lost anything by pleasing a man. Kiss me now and run off to bed. I'm sleepy. Night! Lil' Jill, be happy."

Glory's advice was too practical for Jill's taste. She had crept back to bed feeling ruffled and a little disgusted.

Next morning the too practical Glory had gone away, and since then Jill had been too depressed to think of Count Arkozi or anything else, except her return to London. But, as she dressed for dinner, her spirits rose and when she went down to the hall to meet him, no one could have guessed how miserable she had been.

He was waiting for her near the doorway and was still wearing his overcoat.

Where would she like to dine? She did not know: somewhere where there was plenty of music and life.

He took her to a *cabaret*, where every table was in a little

## Sweet Pepper

box like the family pews that still exist in some village churches. The stage was in the centre of the room and sunk, and round it the boxes rose like the ring of a circus.

The artistes when not performing flitted from box to box, talking and drinking with the audience. Most of the men were in day clothes; and of the women, half was made up by bourgeois wives, "out" with their husbands, and a good many doubtful Jewesses, and the other half were there frankly for profit of some kind.

"One is expected to order champagne," Count Arkozi said, but though a bottle of it was opened and Jill tried a little, they drank white wine. "The Hungarian champagne has been very bad since the war," he told her, and he never drank it.

The waiter talked to them in English, which he had learnt in America, in a voice exactly like that of a stage nigger. He spoke of England as "the old country" which amused Jill.

Most of the turns consisted of couples, who danced exaggerated ball-room dances. A decayed, yellow-headed French woman, who looked like a starved canary, sang some songs. Later in the evening there was a sketch which pretended to be English. The artistes, too, were English, but of the type that in England would have been seen in a circus or at a fair. They indulged in a good deal of rough and tumble which was much appreciated by Count Arkozi and the rest of the audience.

"Oh, he is funny, ver-ry droll," he kept saying, as one of the players who pretended to be drunk threw things at another and fell down.

Later Jill heard two of these actors talking together in some dialect that she took to be Lancashire. She had not heard the language of the streets for a long while and it brought back to her very clearly the early memories of when she used to go to the War Office. Those had been very happy days, she thought, as she listened to a stout Viennese soprano. The world had seemed a much more clear and ordered place for her then: she had had no real anxieties.

## On the Brink

Count Arkozi was humming the tune that was being played and was watching her gaily. He seemed very happy to-night. Jill wondered if he was really a little fascinated by her. Without having intended to she looked at him through her eyelashes, and then feeling she had been a little abandoned, blushed.

"I find you most pretty to-night," he told her and touched her hand lightly. His touch was playful, it was not clinging. To her the contact was soothing but not in the least electrical. What a pity she could not fall in love with him. He was nice-looking: she admired him, and now that she was depressed, she would have liked to be petted.

She would like to be in love with him: only she was not, not in the least: that was the trouble. She envied girls who could fancy that they loved any man who was nice to them. She supposed many of her friends would have liked to have been kissed by him. As for herself, the idea did not repel her, but it was not at all exciting. She had been kissed before by men she had not loved, but usually it had happened in some emotional moment, such as the night before they went back to the front. For the time she had been under the influence of some strong feeling, even if it had not been love itself. Once she had carried on, out of sheer wanton high spirits, a flirtation which had led to kisses, but when it had, she had been disgusted with herself and had cut it short. If only she could be in love with him, it would be so much easier for her . . . so much easier.

When dinner was over and the table cleared, he moved their chairs so that they might face the stage and thus they sat side by side.

"Will you be staying long in Budapest?" she asked him.

"Nine or ten weeks, certainly so much," he answered. "I have promised myself a holiday. I have not amused myself for many months and there are many of my good friends in Pest now. In three or four months I must begin again what I told you of. Perhaps I go to Russia to

## Sweet Pepper

look for our escaped Bolsheviki : perhaps there will be work, much more important. No one can tell now."

"Do you have rooms of your own here ?" Jill asked.

"Oh, yes. I have them a long time. They are ver-ry near by your hotel. It is not fashionable for apartments, but I please myself to see the river. My apartment is in a house above the Pester Lloyd. The vista of the river I find most good from my apartment. Perhaps you will come and see me one day. I am most happy if you will. We will make tea : I have always tea with milk, like England."

She would like to see his rooms, Jill said, but she would be going home to England soon.

"Soon ! You must stay longer. I want ver-ry much that you stay. You must not go," he said.

"I can't truly," Jill said, shaking her head. Oh, how she longed not to have to return home.

Presently he slipped his fingers inside her elbow and caressed her arm. It was comforting to be petted, Jill thought. She did not mind.

"Do stay a little longer," he was asking her. "Relate me you will."

Oh, if only she could !

His hand on her arm, the music, her cigarette were all soothing : anxiety had drawn away a little from her. Perhaps going without food for so long had increased her depression : certainly dinner had cheered her, though she had drunk little.

All too soon for her the performance was over, and the audience trooped out into the street.

Would she prefer to drive or walk ? She would walk. She wanted above everything to put off the time when she would be alone. She did not feel tired and she would have liked the *cabaret* to have lasted longer.

What was she going to do ? Was she going to do anything at all really ? She might not have another chance of enjoying herself and besides . . . perhaps . . . She did not want the evening to be over yet : she did not want to be alone yet. While she was with him, she was not

## On the Brink

depressed . . . besides . . . no, she wanted the evening to last longer . . . to give her more time . . . more time to . . . to make up her mind or, better, to have it made up for her. She did not know what she wanted to do. She must do something to-night or she must go back to London. The minutes were slipping away. Soon the chance would be gone. Chance of what? She did not know.

If she could put off going back to the hotel for a little, something, she did not know what, might turn up. Something that might show her some way, that might make some course of action easier for her.

They walked down the Kiraly Utca, the trams had ceased and, except for a few prowling cabs, there was no traffic. Here and there muffled civilians and a few grey-coated soldiers chatted and dawdled, but most of those still abroad were scurrying home. At a corner they stopped and bought hot chestnuts from an old woman who stood by a charcoal stove.

Soon they reached the parts of the city which Jill knew. They were near the river and, as they passed a side street, she could hear the lap, lap of the water against the quays. The wind sighed over the empty roadway and stirred pieces of paper in the gutters. It was cold! Jill shivered and drew her cloak more tightly round her.

Presently Count Arkozi's hand on her arm checked her and they stopped outside a dark open doorway. There was no one in the street.

"This is where I live," he said. "Will you see my rooms now, before I take you home? It will be most kind if you do."

Jill stiffened for a moment and held her breath: a respite for a little longer, a dangerous . . . oh, what did it matter? She could trust him. No one knew her in Budapest. What could it matter? It seemed so far away from England and it seemed so little like reality. This existence did not touch existence in England: the two worlds revolved round different suns. She was depressed: she did not want to be alone yet. What did it matter?

## CHAPTER III

### Jill Fell Down

THEY climbed the wide stone stairway. The walls and the trend of the stairs were discernible, but nothing was clear. On the landings, passages yawned dark and mysterious, leading to rooms where clocks ticked unwatched.

She had taken a decisive step, Jill realized. Outside in the street she had accepted partly on impulse and partly so as to put off again the time when she would be alone. There could be no turning back now: the adventure had started. She had never done anything so unconventional before, but she was not afraid though she had no idea what would happen next. The uncertainty excited her: in any case it was better than going back to bed and worrying. Something might turn up.

"My *appartement* is on the highest stage, there are two more," Count Arkozi said.

They reached the door, which he unlocked, and Jill passed through. Inside it was much warmer: a faint glow of firelight through the door made the shape of the hall visible. Water dripped somewhere into a bath or sink.

Count Arkozi, from behind her, drew off her cloak, and taking her by the shoulders, turned her towards him. What did it matter? she thought, and lifted her face to meet his kiss.

He led her through the open door and into a sitting-room with his fingers still lightly on her shoulder. In passing he switched on the light.

The room was a long one, with three curtained windows on one side of it. At the end was a white china stove which reached almost to the ceiling and in which an open

## Jill Fell Down

fire glowed. On each side were long English arm-chairs. Jill ran to one and sat on the edge of it warming her hands at the fire.

"I will make some coffee," he said. "You will excuse me if I leave you alone, but I have no servant who sleeps here."

Jill was glad to be alone for a moment or two.

The walls were darkly papered and were hung with pictures, some oil portraits of riding horses; some modern paintings of war scenes, which Jill supposed were clever, guns being drawn through deep snow, infantry passing through birch woods and scarcely discernible in the dappled shadows: some "groups" souvenirs of his Varsity days in England. Along the wall was a deep divan with cushions covered with elaborate peasant embroidery, in those rebellious colour schemes which the Russian Ballet brought to London. Over the divan hung some curved swords in jewelled scabbards, some fencing foils and trophies of the mechanical war. On the floor was something that looked like string matting covered with rough designs in bright colours. Some heavy cabinets and a bureau, in the Maria Teresa and Biedermeier styles, stood against the walls. The room was dimly lit by two standard lamps, heavily shaded, one in crimson and the other in blue silk, and by the glow of the stove. These richly coloured rays glowing on the surfaces and glinting on the high lights of the furniture, created a kaleidoscopic effect.

The room had a more personal character than Jill would have expected in that of a man who lived alone and who was not interested in the Arts. The furniture and older pictures were probably inherited, she thought: the cushions and the floor covering were the work of peasants at his home: the realistic war pictures any soldier might have bought. Perhaps war and Cubism have something in common.

Had he often entertained women here? She had imagined that he was generally very little concerned with them.



## Sweet Pepper

She turned to the books in a revolving cabinet by her side. There were some sporting novels of Surtees, in the familiar red covers that her father had had, a book on fly fishing, some German works on military subjects, novels of Stevenson and Kipling and many paper-covered ones in English, French and Hungarian, some motoring maps and the official copy of the Peace Treaty, which she had often handled in Vienna.

Jill lay back in the depths of her chair and watched the steady glow of the fire. What did she want to happen? She was not yet quite certain. She would let events take their course for a little and then she would try to guide them in the way she might wish. Perhaps she had been a fool to wander into such an equivocal position, but all the while she was glad to be sitting by this fire under any circumstances. She did not want to leave it and go to her hotel yet. She wondered what Count Arkozi would do on his return. Would he try to make love to her in some way or other? Men were like that. If it was not too fervent she would not mind: not to-night. She even wanted to be petted a little. She had wanted to be comforted all the evening. Yes, to be petted a little, as long as he did not. . . . Perhaps she was on the brink of a new experience. She could not tell. She had no form or plan, nor even any fixed idea of what she hoped for or wanted to happen.

She was no more innocent than most girls of her age of the possibilities that lurked in her present situation, but she had taken care of herself for so long, that she was now curious rather than frightened. She was confident of her ability to prevent matters going further than she wanted. Clarissa Harlow is very dead!

Presently Count Arkozi returned with a laden tray and came over to the fireside. They drank the Turkish coffee he had made and afterwards, a gramophone was brought from a dark corner and set on the revolving bookcase by her side.

Count Arkozi changed the records and while they were played sat on the side of Jill's chair, his arm slightly about

## Jill Fell Down

her neck. Sometimes he patted her cheek and once kissed her forehead.

Outside the wind fretted round the corners of the house: sometimes the stove roared softly. Jill was happier than she had been all day. She enjoyed being made much of. There was certainly nothing to be afraid of in this. She wished that it might go on: she hated the idea of having to return to her hotel and of the thoughts that would come to her when she was alone. Yet she could not remain here for ever. She snuggled further back into the deep chair and determined not to ask for another ten minutes what the hour might be.

A deep-toned clock behind her kept up a dignified tick-tack. She imagined it old with strangely shaped figures on its face and big fingers creeping round it. Time never slept! How she wished it could rest a little, when she was happiest. It went on measuring the minutes: tick tack: tick tack: presently she would have to go: dawn would come, quivering and unwelcome: another day: another week: and she would be in England looking for work. Oh, that the time might pass slowly, slumber for a little!

She would smoke one more cigarette and then she would ask the time. If it were after one she must go. She tried to make the cigarette last as long as possible. Count Arkozi was asking her about how long she would stay in Budapest. One had to answer: but she tried to avoid facing the meaning of his words. She smoked the cigarette till it scorched her lips, but in the end it was finished. Then she threw it away and asked what time it was.

The light in the room was so dim that Count Arkozi had to go over to the clock to see. It was quarter to two.

Jill sat up. He was begging her to stay a little longer. No, it was no use. It would be as bad having to leave in another half of an hour as it was now, and she would have to make the effort all over again. She would go now.

He brought her cloak, but put it on the back of the chair and laid his hands on her shoulders.

"One more kiss, please," he said and drew her to him.

## Sweet Pepper

She did not resist. She was thinking about London. He kissed her forehead, her eyes, folding an arm about her and pressing her closer to him, her lips.

What a pity she did not love him! He was so nice: he was so gentle. What a pity! She stirred a little in his arms to free herself.

"I do not want you to go," he whispered in her ear. "Will you not stay here the night?"

She leaned back to escape his lips and shook her head. She was neither shocked nor offended. Men were like that: they could not help it: they always got like that when they kissed one. He did not stir any answer in her: she felt lethargic, objective. Over his shoulder she was watching the fire glowing as gusts of wind passed outside. How still it was in the room!

"Will you stay?" he repeated. "I didn't think to ask you this. I wished to be good, but I am not. Do not go. I want you more now than I want anything. Always I try to think only of the work, almost I do but I cannot always, and now I want you so much. Darling": he bent over her, his lips close to hers.

Jill liked his pleading, though it meant nothing to her. The sound of his voice was soothing. She was not even considering what he was saying. If only the night would go on! But time was passing and in a week she would be looking for work. If only he had asked her to marry him she would have accepted now; oh, gladly. She liked him: he was very kind: and she would be free from anxiety. But he was asking for something quite different. Of course he was right to try to get what he could. Men were all like that. The thought made her feel rather bitterly towards their sex. It was what Glory said, wasn't it? It was so easy for men. They had the right to take what they could. Women got very little in the world. She felt that sex antagonism which Kitty always had for men.

She freed herself and sat on the arm of her chair, tidying her hair and began to put on her hat. She was a little out of breath.

## Jill Fell Down

"Why won't you stay?" he was asking her. Why!! It was all right for him, a few pleasant hours, but for her it meant the surrender of everything; it would alter life for her. It was not as if she would even escape going back to London or the search for work. It was not as if . . .

She sat very still for a while, her hands folded in her lap. He was speaking, she knew, but she did not listen to what he was saying. Men must always say much the same things at these times, she thought. What did it matter? What did it matter which? They all came from the same album!

All evening she had had a feeling that something momentous might happen, perhaps . . . what would he say if she asked him? . . . he might despise her if she said it . . . what did it matter? And if he agreed? . . . What then? . . . Kitty would never know: nor Janet for that matter: her mother was too absorbed in her own affairs to worry as to where her daughters might be. For Jill, Kitty had become head of the family. There was no one else to consider. It was not as if it were in England or France or any other of those countries which were really almost the same. It was here, in Hungary . . . a fairy-tale land. It was like doing something in a dream: it would not matter, after one woke. England was very far away; so real and methodical and matter of fact; so matter of fact that it seemed scarcely real at all in this "once upon a time" country. What did it matter which was real? they could not both be; not in the same way. England was so far away; much farther away than any distance could make it . . . and six months . . . it was not a long time.

She sat up again. Her cape was on her arm, she was wearing her hat.

"Give me a cigarette, I want to talk for a minute or two," she said in a voice, so cold that it surprised her. She lit the cigarette, moved over to the divan and sat down.

"Sit down by the fire, please," she said, "no, turn out

## Sweet Pepper

the lights first. I shall say what I want to say more easily if it is dark."

The lights were extinguished; first the red and then the blue, so that the glow on the walls turned suddenly to moonlight and then vanished. She could just see Count Arkozi standing by the stove.

"No, please sit down in that chair, with your back to me. Otherwise I shall have to go at once."

She saw him sink into the chair. For a long while there was silence, while she considered how she should begin.

"You've asked me to stay here," she began. "I won't pretend I don't know what that means. I suppose you think that you want me to stay very badly. No. Please don't interrupt."

She paused and drew at her cigarette. It was easier than she expected.

"Now I want to say something," she went on. "If you don't agree to what I say you need say nothing, and when I've said what I have to, I will go away. I have all my things here and I can let myself out. You won't have anything to do or say. In fact you mustn't. Just sit there and say nothing. You must promise that if you don't agree to what I have to say that you will sit where you are, till after I'm gone. You mustn't try and persuade me any more . . . you mustn't see me ever again either . . . but I shall be gone to England as soon as I can get a ticket.

"I must explain a little about myself first. No! don't look at me. Go on watching the fire. Things didn't turn out as they were expected to. The war came: my father was killed."

She told him of her work at the War Office and in Vienna, of her fear for the future, of the farm and what it would mean to Kitty and herself, of her desperate need of the purchase money. Her voice was breaking; she was overwhelmed with self-pity.

"Well we had this chance and it seems we must lose it because we haven't got the necessary money, not really

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very much. And I've been worrying and worrying how it could be got. To-day after lunch . . . at least after. . . ."

No she could not tell him that she had had no lunch; that would seem to be taking a mean advantage.

"In the Ritz I was watching some of those women, the Necker Baby and another, and I thought that they could make enough in a few months to give me this chance for life."

She lit another cigarette and drew at it till the paper snapped, hot and red.

"Now don't answer me: don't say anything or I can't go on at all: and don't turn round."

"Well, it has come to this with me: that you asked me to stay and, on a business footing I will.

"No, don't answer! I know it's loathesome to talk business about such a thing . . . you don't suppose I haven't suffered anything, or I . . . you don't suppose any woman cares to say these . . . But it must be on a business footing."

She stopped. The clock reasserted itself in the silence. Tick tack: tick tack: time was passing: soon they'd both be dead and it would not much matter what had happened: it would soon be over. Was it worth while going on with it? was anything worth while? but in the meanwhile she'd got to go on living. Even a complete pessimism is a luxury that the needy cannot afford.

"I will tell you my terms," she went on, "and if you think they're too high or if you don't like such things, unless they're given freely. . . . Oh, yes, I know they should be. I was as romantic as . . . only I've had it knocked out of me. It's just sheer fright that's making me do this.

"Anyhow if you don't accept you needn't say anything: just sit still and go on watching the fire and I'll slink out. Then you won't see me any more, because I'll be going back to London . . . to look for work.

"I don't know what my value is in this way. How should I? I suppose any woman's worth what she can

## Sweet Pepper

get. I've been brought up as a lady : I can dance well : I'm not a depressing companion, as a rule : at least I wasn't, and I wouldn't be : and . . . it's the first time. There hasn't been any one else. I'm not in the least in love with you, though I like you all right. That's fair. I don't suppose I could care for you more than that, but I'm not in love with any one else. I liked one or two young soldiers during the war, but they were quite boys. Two were killed and one's drifted away somewhere ; anyhow I didn't love them really. That's my value ; for what it is.

" Now what my terms are : I had to work it all out : I didn't even mean to, but the ideas kept coming to me this afternoon in the Ritz, creeping into my mind when I wasn't thinking.

" I want my living expenses and a hundred a month : I know it's a terrible lot in your money, but then in six months I'd have enough to go back and to get the farm.

" Don't tell me I'm wicked or say anything like that, for God's sake. I've thought and I've thought.

" Now think over what I've said for a minute or two. Sit still : sit still. I'm lighting a cigarette now : if you haven't said anything before it's finished I shall go away."

She buried her face in her hand and waited. She had done it now ! She had wanted to cry while she had been speaking, but now she was calmer. Did such things happen, she wondered : had other women ? She was moulding her own life with a vengeance now ! And it was not as if she were even wicked : she was only a coward. What desperate things cowards had to do. Her lips were very dry. She lit the cigarette. As she bent over it, her short curls brushed her shoulders : she remembered so well the day she had bobbed her hair, four years ago : that was her first month at the War Office. Looking back she seemed to have been very happy then.

Count Arkozi was stirring the fire. " When I asked you to stay," he began, " I did not know whether you were good or not. In Hungary a girl who is as free as an

## Jill Fell Down

English girl would not be good any more. It is difficult for us to understand the English : the men yes ; we like the same things, but the ladies are so different. I think to me : if she is not good perhaps she will stay ; if she is good then she will not. It seemed to me fair play. I find you more sweet than any girl I have met, so I asked you. I did not think ver-ry deep. I wanted you, so I asked you. I did think of the to-morrow.

"I would have answered you before, but I was making sums to know how much one hundred pounds is in our valuta ; but I am not ver-ry clever at it and it takes long. It is much. Certainly I cannot give it you for six months, unless I sold my land and there is a *majorat* in my family, so I may not. But I will get enough to give you two hundred pounds. To-morrow I will see a very good friend of mine about it. But that is a present ; I will not buy you. You must allow that I give that. I try to be good, but one is not : sometimes it makes me sad, then again I do not mind. Now I have this chance you must let me make this."

He raked savagely at the fire which glowed and roared softly.

Jill considered what he said dispassionately. She was very tired : so tired that she could consider her own case impersonally. A little while ago she had been near tears, but she had overcome her weakness. Now she could reason, but she was not capable of feeling any more. Emotionally she was finished.

"It is very fine of you, that," she began. "I didn't know what you'd say at all ; but I felt it would be something different to other people. That's the side of you I saw on the boat. But it would not be any use. I don't want you to give me a present ; but that does not matter. You see two hundred pounds would be a wonderful lot of money to me, but it wouldn't be any use. If I can't get the farm it wouldn't give me this chance. If I take money at all, I'd want to make enough for that. If I take two hundred either I would have to go back to London and . . . look for work . . . or if I made up



## Sweet Pepper

my mind to and I could . . . I'd have to find some one else to make up the rest of the money.

"If you could afford two hundred and you want me, take me and at the end of two months . . . Oh. . . . I can't talk about it."

Jill sat biting her fingers, listening to the faint noises in the room, the clock, the stove, the faint creak as Count Arkozi stirred in his chair. The fire was dying; she could scarcely see him: his back was still turned to her.

"Do you . . . ?" he began, and then after a long pause, "You want me to make this?"

Jill nodded, forgetting that he could not see her. After a long while she began speaking, or thinking aloud.

"You see I don't know what I want. You must see that. I want both things. . . . I'm at the end of everything . . . I should feel ashamed and I feel . . . nothing . . . just that. I've told you everything. I've told you my terms. If you accept, I stay. If you don't answer, I go. I don't know which I want. It is as if I cared so little, that I left it to you to decide. I don't want to make up my mind . . . again . . . I can't."

Her voice had grown softer and more and more indistinct: now it died away. For a while she sat disconsolately, her shoulders bent, her elbows between her knees. She did not want to go on living. She wished she were already dead.

Presently she sighed, gathered up her cloak and got up to go. The wind moaned in the chimney.

"I agree," said Count Arkozi. His voice seemed to come from a great way off. She heard the words, but nothing seemed to have a meaning any more. She must be going: that was it. She had moved a step or two towards the door, when his hand touched her shoulder.

"Oh," she said; she had not known that he had moved from the stove.

"I agree," he repeated.

So she was to stay! She turned round and moved mechanically towards the divan again.

## **Jill Fell Down**

"No, you must go home now, you are very tired. I will come and see you to-morrow," he said.

She had reached the divan now. "I don't want to go," she said; "I want to cry; not long. Oh no, I'm not repenting. It won't be long . . . but I must cry. I won't go."

She threw off her hat and, sinking on to the sofa, buried her face in the cushions.

## CHAPTER IV

### Bruises

**I**T was five o'clock and in her bedroom at the Ritz Jill, crouched over the electric stove, was taking tea.

It seemed incredible to her how, in the last twenty-four hours, her position in the world had changed. The previous evening she had been almost at the end of her resources and near the edge of despair, but she had done nothing in her life to compromise her future, such as it might be. Like many who have little to show she had nothing to hide. Now her living expenses were assured for a month and she had one hundred pounds in English money, which was being transferred to swell her small bank balance in London. She seemed on her way to making her fortune. If she continued to prosper like this she would be able to return home in six months with money enough to secure for Kitty and herself the farm and their future.

What a change of prospect! She had gained so much; and she did not even feel wicked. It would be too awful if any one found out: that was all. But why should any one? There was so few English in Budapest and she knew none of them. Railway and passport difficulties were still so great that no one was likely to come to Hungary except on government service or very important business, and the chances that she would know any of the few soldiers, diplomats or others who might come to Budapest seemed very small. Even if one of them did know her, she could talk evasively. Knowing that she had been connected with Military Intelligence in Vienna, any one would fancy her doing some secret service work.

She knew just the air she would have to assume to give that impression.

The truth was too unlikely to be suspected. Her present circumstances seemed fantastically impossible. Who would imagine that a descendant of the famous General Mordaunt who had been brought up in a quiet English village, who had been to most respectable schools, and had been employed with the British Military Mission in Vienna, should be in Budapest as the mistress of some one she had not even met six weeks before.

Yet to her, as she looked back at it, the sequence of events seemed to have led her inevitably to her present position. No, she did not feel wicked : she had planned nothing. What else could she have done ! Kitty's misfortunes had settled it for her. She felt no responsibility : circumstances had been too strong.

Now that she was no longer fearful of the future she was happier, but otherwise nothing seemed changed since the day before. She had imagined that to a woman her first surrender to man would be an event without parallel in her life : that after it the world would appear changed : it was the general idea. She would have expected that, mentally at least, she would have been conscious of some vast change in herself. She had never, like many girls she knew, ventured further than the return of kisses ; she had never hovered on the delicious brink of surrender. Yet emotionally and sensually the experience had not seemed so utterly new. She had expected something utterly different from any other emotion. She had imagined that the first hours of revelation must be an event comparable with nothing else, unique as death and, however desired, as harsh in its finality. Yet, as she looked back on it, its discoveries had fallen short of what she had expected : she felt just the same as before : she did not even feel more mature. Perhaps the change was a gradual one ; yet she was astonished how little difference it had made to her. In a way she was also relieved, and a little disappointed.

For the first time for many days she was free from

## Sweet Pepper

anxiety about the immediate future : that was all the difference there was : that and the seed of something else of which she was not yet conscious : that sense of shame, not so much of what she had done, as of having something that must for ever be hidden.

She would never be able to marry, not now. That was obvious. No one would marry her if he knew and . . . she mightn't be virtuous, that was her own concern, but she couldn't. . . .

Oh ! There were some things one couldn't do ! No ! if she ever met a man who . . . But she might never have the chance, probably never would. No good going over that !

She had renounced the right to marry, but in six months, if her good luck lasted, her future would be assured. The arrangement with Count Arkozi was an excellent one for her, but it was only for a short time. He was to pay her one hundred a month in English money and all her living and dress expenses, but he could not promise to do so for more than two months, because the cause to which he devoted himself might call him away. Two months he could promise and after that time if he had to go away, he then would try to . . . no ! There was no need to think about that now, she determined. For two months at any rate she was secure and then she would be a third of the way towards freedom. If only things went well with her she would be able to leave it all in six months. Then it would be something behind her, something that no one must ever know, that she must forget. Would she be able to forget it ? Anyhow, so far it was not as bad as she had thought it might be : indeed so far it was pleasant enough. She had a balance at the bank, her hotel bill had been paid, she had some new clothes.

She shivered and drew the stove closer to her knees. The room seemed very cold to-night, but then the hot water pipes had never reached even a tepid heat all day. It must be dreadful for the poor out there : out there the snow, which had fallen all day, lay piled high. It must lie deep all over the vast plain, incredibly melancholy

## Bruises

now . . . and it was nearly the end of March. It would be Autumn before she would be able to go home. April, May, June, July, August, September. If all went well she would be free by then. Oh, it must be! It must be. She had staked everything on that chance. It must succeed. She had staked everything indeed, but she was not going to be sentimental about her virginity, now that she had lost it: that would be ridiculous as well as futile. Only men were sentimental about things like that.

In the past she had remained virtuous for a mixture of reasons, the clearest of which had been that she had never been excessively tempted. Beyond this, she had thought that to let a man lead one to the further intimacies was to cheapen oneself; she would have left behind her something of self-respect in the process. The abstract morality in the matter had not troubled her mind. Like most girls of her class and generation she thought all conduct was "decent" or "rotten." The reaction against Victorian dogmatism had gone as far as to make "right" and "wrong" words to be avoided.

She had done something which it would be unthinkable dreadful for any one to know of, but of which she was only a little ashamed. She was too young to have known the pre-war moral standards and in those uncertain days women had given themselves more freely. Perhaps some of them had envied men the monopoly of whatever bitter joy sacrifice may bring: perhaps some had wished to brand, as deeply as could be, upon themselves the memory of what might be the man's last leave: always there was glamour to clothe wantonness.

At the War Office she had seen much of this side of life. It had been amongst her first impressions of the grown-up world, after she had left school. In the beginning Jill had been shocked: no one had ever told her that women of her own class behaved like this. Afterwards she had come to regard such a state of affairs as normal, though secretly she had still thought it "rather horrid."

Later she had become aware that it was not only the married women who indulged in such affairs. Some of

## Sweet Pepper

the girls she knew confided to her, sentimentally or as a joke, their adventures. Of course there were others who acted differently, but of the younger women many would not have had the courage to admit to being shocked even if they were.

This tag, typical of those times, was pasted one day upon the wall of the room in which she worked:—

“There was a young lady of fashion,  
Who loved her young man with great passion.  
When the clock struck eleven,  
She said, ‘Well, thank heaven,  
There’s one thing Lord Rhondda can’t ration.’

Latterly, in those critical hours when the course she had taken had seemed more and more inevitable, she had judged it by her own moral standards. What harm would it do to any one? To her mother? They had not lived together for nearly four years, and her mother interested herself less and less in her daughters. No, her mother would never know about it. Jill did not even feel deceitful for keeping this from her mother: lately she had kept most things from her. Then there was Kitty and Janet. Janet, like her mother, was self-absorbed: Janet did not matter. About Kitty Jill had qualms. Kitty loved her so dearly and would have starved herself to have prevented such a thing happening: Kitty would think her horribly wicked, she knew. The farm which they would share, would be paid for in part, by what Kitty would think to be sin. She would never know, of course, but . . . no she did not like to think of deceiving Kitty.

There was no one else that mattered. There was Aunt Mary: she would almost have liked Aunt Mary to know: serve her right! Then there was Jill herself, her self-respect, her future: these were her own concerns. It might be foolish to barter them, but she did not see how it could be wicked. It would be she who would have to pay the price, whatever it might be. She could not marry, except by living a constant lie. She would be living a lie in deceiving Kitty, but that would be different. She

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was being driven to it : and her past could not be the same injury to her sister as it would be to a man, she might . . . might . . . no, she could never marry !

She had thought of all these things and now it was no good going over them again. She must invent some excuse why she had not returned to England. It would be better to get it over at once and have done with it. She stretched out and reached for her pen and the blotter from the writing-table.

What should she say ? As little as possible : she did not want to decorate deceit.

“KITTY MY OWN,—

“I have found a wonderful chance. I have got some work here that is extremely well paid. If it lasts till the Autumn I shall have saved enough for us to be able to buy the farm. Darling, isn't it wonderful?”

Jill paused and gnawed her pen. What should she say about this work of hers ? Kitty would want to know. Presently she began to write again.

“I can't tell you what sort of work it is as I can't let you know through the post, but it is marvellously well paid and it is nothing dangerous. So, darling, you need not worry. I do hope you'll get some decent job again soon. How are you managing ? I can let you have some money if you want. Mind you tell me if you would like it. What news of Mum ? She never writes to me now. I don't often write to her. Will you let her know I've got a new job when you write and that I shall be out here until the Autumn.”

Yes, it would be easier not to have to lie to more people than necessary, Jill thought.

“Such a wonderful view from my bedroom, over the Danube. Think of living in a Ritz Hotel for only about seven shillings a day, all in. I like the people much



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better than the Austrians. Glory Heathcote, the American woman, and her tame male have left for Paris. She was a good sort and I miss her very much. It is still very cold here, though it's the warmest winter they have had for years. There are thousands of poor people who have fled from the occupied parts of Hungary and who are living in railway wagons, a town of them. I went to a charity performance at the opera for them the other night. They say there are ten thousand of them. There is no possible housing for them in Budapest. Some of the children even are sleeping in the House of Lords. In the other towns it is as bad. There is plenty of food here. Everything one wants. A change after Vienna! The hotel servants are darlings. All the waiters can speak English. The one on my floor was prisoner of war in England and went out on farm work. He worked for some of the Hobhouses and said he was never so happy or well treated in his life. I was glad to hear it because they never interned the English here, and one would not like to think we were rotten in exchange. There is the sweetest little peasant who cleans my bathroom—my own private bathroom mark you! She wears a dress of home-woven canvas and thin bare legs, and she sings to herself all the time she's working. Such pretty sounding folk-songs. I wonder what they're about, but she cannot speak even in German. I'm happier than I've been for a long time now that I've got work. I was dreading dreadfully coming back to England, though I didn't want to depress you about it. I'd sooner do anything out here. Though, of course, what I've got here is too splendidly lucky. Oh, I do want you to get work again, darling. Good-bye, my own Kitty,

“ Your

“ JILL.”

## CHAPTER V

### While the Duna Flows on

JILL continued to live at the Ritz, though she often stayed at Count Arkozi's flat till dawn. On such occasions she would not allow him to escort her home, but walked the short distance by herself and, as she entered the hotel, carried dancing shoes ostentatiously in her hand, to suggest a reason for keeping such hours. Probably the sleepy night porter who took her up in the lift to the fourth floor never gave her a thought.

She and Tibor Arkozi were never seen together at her hotel and no one, as far as she knew, suspected the existence of the *liaison*.

During the morning Tibor did gratuitous work in some government department and this often kept him till three o'clock. So Jill either lunched alone at the Ritz or waited till very late, to have it with him at some other restaurant.

Five or six nights a week they dined together and often went afterwards to a music-hall or musical comedy. They avoided the opera, as she did not wish to be seen by the English or other foreigners. Two nights each week she insisted on picnicing at his flat: and on these evenings, as he had no servant living in, she did the cooking herself. The gas stove burnt yellow and smelt horribly of sulphur, because the little coal left in Hungary since the Armistice was of wretched quality. She enjoyed these evenings and liked having some work to do. In many ways she would have preferred to have had a flat of her own and to have done the housework, but in any case the housing difficulty would have made this impossible.

She liked these evenings also because she was able to

## Sweet Pepper

wear a tea gown and comfortable slippers : that was a treat after having lived in hotels for over a year and dining in cheap restaurants, which necessitated wearing day shoes from morning till bed-time. She enjoyed sitting on the sofa by the wood fire and listening to the gramophone : then there were English books to read, almost the first she had seen since she had left London. They were mostly boyish books, but that sort pleased her. *Rodney Stone* had been one of her favourites at school, and now she read it again, and *Brigadier Gerard* for the first time ; or rather Tibor read it aloud to improve his English. In many ways the character of the book reminded her of him : they were both Hussars, and wore the same Hungarian dress : they were both devil-may-care : both were at times gay and at others wedded to the pursuit of a great national adventure. Tibor never bragged, but with his round head, his short brown hair, his quick eyes and his ready smile, he might have been a man of the Midi.

She grew fond of him : he was so happy-natured and so quick to laugh at himself : but she could not love him, and, having given herself to him, she might have hated him for this, if he had not been so simple.

Nor did he love her : she was always conscious of that. She doubted if he had ever loved any woman except his mother, of whom he often talked. He explained how the peasants worshipped her, how during the war she had made her house into a hospital and had nursed herself. He told Jill with still fresh enthusiasm of how happy it had made him when, one rainy night on the Russian front, chance had thrown him against a trooper of another regiment, who had told him, quite unknowingly, how he had been at his mother's hospital and how the patients had loved her.

He had many men friends, whom Jill grew to know by name. The only one she met was Major Zonay, who had been at the "amusement." It was he who commanded the detachment or regiment which bore his name. Tibor himself and practically all his friends seemed to belong

## While the Duna Flows on

to it, but Jill was never certain whether it was an entirely official organization or whether it was a voluntary association of officers and ex-officers. To be a member of it was certainly a distinction : they were spoken of in hushed whispers in every neighbouring country. She had heard the name of Zonay in Vienna and even there the hint that two of his detachment were abroad would have sent the leaders of Bolshevism shuffling out of the cafés through back doors. In Prague Tschekhs cursed his name and on the frontier their sentries shuddered at the thought of him. She read of the detachment in English and foreign papers : Trotsky was said to guard himself against it : The *Daily Herald* launched weekly anathemas against it.

Sometimes Tibor borrowed or hired a motor car and they spent the day in the country ; but Spring had only just begun to break and the roads were scarcely passable. He was proud of showing her the quaint and picturesque customs of the peasants and took her to villages, famous for the beauty of the local national dress.

Sometimes on these expeditions they wandered in the leafless woods till dusk came and then went to the village inn for coffee and poppy seed cakes. Then Tibor would call for gipsies and she and he would sit, huddled against the great china stove, listening to the rustic music till, later in the evening, they would tuck themselves into the fur-lined sacks of the car and drive back to the city.

Jill loved these afternoons, the flickering light in the woods or the grey remorseless skies that stretched to limitless horizons : afterwards the warm glow of the inn stove was delightful, but she dreaded the drive through the seas of mud when the slush and water lapped against the wings hour after hour, as they crept through the darkness back to the city. There was so little light in the villages that one might have fancied them deserted and miles and miles without a house or a sign of life. She had always the feeling that these vast spaces had never been wholly tamed and at night she could fancy Nature reasserting itself. One seemed lost in these immense distances : the idea of a breakdown filled her with ridicu-

## Sweet Pepper

lous panic. The forlorn and deserted factories, closed for lack of materials, that stood outside the city seemed kindly and welcome when she reached them.

All this time she lived very economically. She had determined at the beginning to save every possible penny and she would not allow Tibor to waste any more money on her. Often he wished to give her trinkets or new hats, but almost always she refused.

She had been expensive enough, as it was, she said, perhaps too expensive !

If she had loved him she might have asked him if she was worth so much, but their relationship had never been of that sort. It had been a financial agreement : she had asked her price and she was worth what she could get.

Still he was a dear, and she was not going to let him spend on her more than was necessary : so they lived simply : indeed he often said, laughingly, that supporting her was an economy to him.

Sometimes he would let her ride the hack which he kept at some barracks just outside the town : that was on the days when he would be busy and would not be able to see her until the evening. She used to go to the stables by tram. At the terminus his groom would meet her with the horse and would wait there until she had finished her ride. At first she was covered with confusion when the round-faced soldier lad kissed her hand. Once or twice officers, also mounted, tried to ride by her side and make her acquaintance, but she had no difficulty in shaking them off.

One day she met the Regent returning with his staff from a review. He was mounted on his famous white charger, but still wearing his naval uniform. She had no idea what she ought to do, but she reined up till he had passed. As he did so he raised his hand to his cap. Behind with the other *aides-de-camp* rode Major Zonay on a very wild chestnut. He saluted her and his frozen expression melted for a second. She wondered if he recognized her mount. She did not mind what he knew. Probably he knew or had guessed : it did not matter :

## While the Duna Flows on

she was sure he never talked. If she had not danced with him and seen him do so, she would not have believed that he could ever relax at all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kitty was not as curious as she feared she might be: she was overjoyed at Jill's good fortune and longed to hear all about it. "Not daring to mention things through the post sounded exciting and important." She was still seeking permanent employment but had found a little casual work.

Jill's mother wrote her a letter, chiefly about how vexatious she found the Jersey workmen and the difficulties of obtaining a satisfactory putty for her frames. She was pleased to hear Jill was doing well, especially as she had never expected her to "turn out as well as the other two." She ended "in haste." Her mother always was "in haste."

Punctually on the twenty-ninth day of her new life Jill received a letter saying that a further one hundred pounds had been paid to her account. She had forgotten that the second payment was due.

## CHAPTER VI

### The White Knight

**W**OULD it last? That question kept recurring to her all through those first weeks. It seemed too good to be true. Could she continue to hold Tibor? He must have had so many other women in his life, older, smarter women, who had more *savoir faire*. He did not even love her, he was only attracted to her. She knew so little about the wiles of sex. The art of pleasing a man must, like others, have its technique. She had never been a minx: coquetry was not natural to her. She was not particularly well dressed, and if she had been, smart clothes would not improve her. She was not *chic*: her only real charm was her freshness. Perhaps after all in that she was lucky.

In that field she had less to fear from rivals. At home in any country house party or at a London dance there would be many girls with complexions as pretty as hers, with the same type of good looks and with the same air of being unconscious of them: many would be prettier. In Budapest her rivals were the professional beauties. A few might be as young but nearly all were self-conscious. At first glance one could tell that there were really only two types, the languidly affected or the impudent. Each type affected a different complexion, the first the pale and the second the tints of jungle flowers. No! while she had her youth she had nothing to fear from them, not in looks.

She was not witty, of course, as the Necker notoriously was, but she did not think that a man, who was attracted by herself, could be taken from her by one of these others, not while she kept her freshness and her air of modesty.

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It could only be an air now, she supposed, yet she did not feel less modest than before. Oh, surely, she could not change so much in that six months! Only six months and then it would be over for ever. If she thought otherwise she would. . . . She must keep her thoughts always on the future, on the time when she would have won her freedom.

So far she was actually happy, happier than she had been since the dread of unemployment had first loomed in the distance. Tibor was really fond of her, he liked her for herself as well as for her attractions: she was sure of that. They were real friends.

Once she even wondered whether, if circumstances had been different, he would have cared to marry her. It was in a drowsy hour before dinner and she was lying back, smoking in the big arm-chair that was usually his. She had shed her slippers and was warming her feet before the log fire, regarding with pleasure her new silk stockings. Tibor sat on the floor by her side his chin against her knee. It had always been in her nature to say what she thought with a simplicity that, though she did not know it, was part of her charm. She had been on the point of asking him the question which had occurred to her when she checked herself. At school they had always blamed her for this directness and in the War-Office days they had laughed at "the way she blurted things out." No, she had better not. He might think she was dissatisfied with her present lot. Yet it was silly that, for fear of being misunderstood, one could not ask questions of any one one knew well. She blew her cigarette smoke sharply to the ceiling and shifted in her chair. Tibor was watching her: his brown eyes were laughing at her.

"What is it the little Jill thinks about now? She looks ferocious. I grow frightened!"

"Oh, nothing much," she answered. He was still laughing at her. He was easy to talk to: she could be as natural with him . . . she might as well. . . .

"If you want to know and if you won't think I had any *arrière pensée* I was wondering . . . quite idly . . .



## Sweet Pepper

whether you would have cared to marry me . . . if things had been different ? ”

He shut his eyes and was silent for a minute or two. It was odd how many men she knew, on whose faces one could watch the process of thought. It was rather an engaging trait. Women, as a rule, thought in secret. Kitty did not, but then Kitty was like a man in many ways.

“ I do not know, very little Jill, I will relate to you how things are with us. To begin, I have never wanted to marry. Never, though my poor mother asks me to every time I am by her. She would have me become *rangé*, but I love too much my freedom. Then there is the marriage itself. With us most marriages are made for a reason, to make more things for the family, to get more money, to join two properties, sometimes even to make a conciliation in politics. Politics are more serious with us than in England. It is a great fault by us.”

“ We shouldn’t like to marry like that,” Jill said. “ I suppose we are too romantic, yet we are very practical as a nation. But I suppose you are, too, for the upper class here seems to be still very rich, while in Vienna they seem as broke as they possibly can be. Why is that ? ”

“ There are several reasons to it,” said Tibor after a little thought. The important reason is that they had their fortunes in societies of manufacture, which are not any more worth. But by us our aristocracy have our fortunes in lands which are let, so if food is most dear as it is now, we have more money from our land. In Hungary the middle class is so, quite ruined.”

“ It does sound as if you’ve been pretty practical, doesn’t it ? ” Jill laughed. “ Of course in England everything is different. The class distinctions are much less marked and we are much more tolerant in everything, that’s why, I suppose.”

“ To the contrary,” said Tibor. “ I find we are most tolerant. It is not truth to say we are not tolerant. If you concern yourself in the many races which are in Hungary the Magyars were ver-ry tolerant by them.

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otherwise after ver-ry many hundreds of years, they would not still speak their own languages and make their own customs. By the property of my uncle that is in North Hungary, there are four villages, one to each gate of his park and in each, one speaks another language and makes everything different. If we had been intolerant would such things be after many centuries? I find quite to the contrary.

"Then if one concerns oneself with religion it is the same. One is Catholic or one is Protestant, it makes nothing. There is one appointment by the Court, ver-ry important, the keepers of the Royal Jewelry. It is made by two gentlemen. One must be Catholic, and the other Protestant. But of course the classes here are ver-ry distinct. One is of the aristocracy, or one is not. There is the peasant who is most good, I find, but the middle classes we do not like. In England it is all middle class. They make everything. They marry every one. We do not find it ver-ry good."

"It does not seem to strike him that I am good enough," occurred to Jill. The thought annoyed her. In their own way the Mordaunts thought a lot of themselves. General Mordaunt of the Mutiny would be remembered as long as there was history in England. She could imagine dear old Uncle Dan's views, if she had told him that she had wished to marry a Hungarian Count. He would not have known where Hungary was. Or Aunt Mary, too. "Quite a nice man, though of course one's so uncertain what to say about a foreign marriage. They tell me he is very well connected . . . in his own country, of course. Do you know only the other day I was hearing . . . and so on and so on. . . ."

"No, very little Jill, I ought to marry never. You do not know, but there are two sides of me, the two different. I do not have control of them. What do people say now? I cannot remember in English . . . *l'être conscient et l'être inconscient, mais je me demande quel est l'être conscient et quel est l'autre*. It is most difficult to explain. I do not talk well."

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He waited till Jill nodded to him in encouragement. He was going to be in an earnest mood, she knew. These moods of his rather thrilled her. She nestled into the corner of her chair and waited.

"There is a side of me that makes me want you and the riding and the wines and the dancing and the racing and the *tziganes* and the crowds in the Vatezi Utca : and so for a long time I am happy : so happy : I cannot explain to you. I love these things. Like that it would be good if I were married. But I am not so always. There is the other side of me.

"Perhaps I am at a picnic or I ride my horse, or I take dinner at the Casino. The wine is good, my glass is full, the *tziganes* make most good music, there are lights shining on the Duna, ladies, all the things that are happiness. Then it comes to me suddenly. I do not care any more for the ladies and the music, or if I am riding I do not care any more to ride, anywhere. Everything that I make is no more any good. It is waste.

"When it comes so, I know that I must not do these things. I do not find them wicked, but they are for my friends. For me, I must go to do things, to make something that is important for me : perhaps something that no one will ever know, or see, or even understand. . . . I cannot explain. It is so difficult. Then I am like the time when you see me first, when I had the Bolshevik that I brought from Wien.

"Before the war I was not often so, sometimes, but not often. It was in the winter in the Carpathians when there was snow, ver-ry deep everywhere so that one could not fight any more, that I find out first that I am in these two parts. I am always alone, with a dozen of my Hussars or so, and no one to talk to for many days. I think very much and I find that I am in these two parts that I cannot mix, but there were many things to do then and I did not think ver-ry long.

"Since the war, now that we have so many unhappinesses and there is the Bolshevism to fear, there are many things to make. It comes more often now, when I cannot

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any more enjoy the music and the dancing. Then I cannot be still. If I am by me in the country I forget to come home for meals. My mother says I grow like the old Hungarians.

' There is a picture by my house of an old Hungarian of my name. One says he was ancestor to me, but, I do not think it, though it is an old picture. It is of Arkozi Arpad. It is not well made : oh, very badly, but when you have seen it you do not forget it. It is . . . I do not know how to explain you how it is made. The face is like a face by the door of a stove, with very clear lights here and very black there. He wears the dress of a nobleman like that that I wear at court, the one you have seen. It is not a big picture. You can see only the upper part of him ; in his two hands he holds a curved sword like I have there. He has a cap with jewels and feather of eagles. He is ver-ry ferocious, with moustaches of only few hairs, ver-ry long and eye-brows together, so that the two are one.

" When I was still a little boy I was so afraid that I would not be left by the picture : afterwards I forgot it, but now I think very often of him. I do not believe that he was ancestor to me, but the one part of me is like him : it is old Hungarian.

" To myself I think that I become old Hungarian now. I must go and make things and do so. Then after a day or weeks I am changed all at once. It is as when one sits too long by the fire at night : one is all at once cold. Then I go back to my home or I come to my apartment here and I make amusement, and again I am so very happy.

" It is difficult : I do not understand, but it is because I am in two parts, that I should not marry."

Jill's hand had been on his shoulder. She liked him when he talked like this. Yes, he thought aloud like General Hawkins used to. She was glad her old General could not know how she was living. He would grow stiff all over and unhappy. She had seen him so. The knowledge would spoil his lunch and his after-dinner nap for weeks. Men were so like boys : they dealt with realities,

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*yet realities shook them so much. Women's minds were more elastic.*

She liked Tibor best when he was serious, as he had just been, yet it was at such times that she felt most afraid of losing him. When he was in such moods she had no power over him. One day he would go away and then what would she do ? She knew that he would do what he could for her ; he would give her a present, or offer to introduce her to some friend who might take her under his protection. The idea of a fresh start was hateful to her. She sat up in her chair.

"Let's go out to dinner now, I'm hungry," she said.

## CHAPTER VII

### Torches in the Night

AS the weeks went by Jill watched with apprehension Tibor's growing restlessness. Spring had come and, in her mind, there seemed some connection between the two.

The roads on the countryside were drying fast : soon it would be the season of travelling and campaigning. Could she hold him ? Already the beech woods beyond Budapest were flecked with delicate green and the golf course, where she and Glory had watched the wintry sunsets, had woken to a carnival of wild flowers.

The sun grew warmer and she began to breakfast on the balcony of her bedroom. Below on the riverside terraces little tables sprung up like mushrooms in a night, and next day the outdoor caf  s were thronged from early morning till sundown. The poor no longer shivered but basked on the quays. The white ferry boats, the gay flags, the great barges and the fussy tugs had returned to the Danube.

But, as the days grew longer, her power to hold Tibor seemed to wane. The situation of Hungary grew more gloomy than ever and, though he seldom talked of such matters, she could read in the *Pester Lloyd*, which was written in German, what was happening.

In Paris the Treaty of the Trianon was taking form and more and more of Hungary's territory was to be taken from her : each square mile another contribution to the new chaos.

At the bidding of a Communist conference at Amsterdam, and because she still stood steadfast, Hungary was being blockaded by the surrounding countries. All about

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her civilization was crumbling. The new frontiers were closed and dumb, but rumours came from beyond them of how Magyars in the occupied territories were faring at the hands of their enemies. Jill had no means of knowing how true these tales might be, but from her work in Vienna, she knew something of these other states. In Slovakia the land and homes of Hungarians were being seized by the Tschekh, their schools shut, their leaders imprisoned. In Transylvania the new rulers revenged their inglorious war exploits on the Magyar population : there, government was sinking in a welter of corruption and disorder : parties of disbanded soldiery roved the country, breaking into houses at night to plunder.

Jill read daily in the *Pester Lloyd* advertisements from sons asking if any one could tell them news of their families, of which they had not been able to hear anything for a year or more.

All this she read or heard, but the misery in Budapest was visible enough. It was thronged with penniless refugees, driven from their homes in the lost territories and living now in railway wagons or cellars. Almost all the factories were shut for want of material. The fallen value of the currency made it impossible for pensioners to live on their pensions : savings had melted. Half the middle class was on the verge of starvation, and it had sold so much of its furniture that there was no longer any market for more.

The better elements in the city were on the verge of despair : the lowest discontented, plotting. How much longer could endurance last ?

Jill could watch this problem in Tibor's expression, on days when the news was worse than usual. At such times he turned over and over the papers and read and read again his letters : then he would sit all morning, smoking fretfully by the open window, or would lounge disconsolately in the long chair he had brought from Oxford. Jill never asked him what was the matter, for she feared that, while he told her, the other side of him of which he had spoken, and of which she daily grew more con-

## Torches in the Night

scious, would assert itself too strongly and, seeking some outlet, would take him from her.

She grew to dread the arrival of the post, as she had done in Vienna. If only she could hold him! If she could keep her sway over him till the Autumn: then she would be free to go home and he to go out on his strange missions and adventures. Yet she felt sometimes that she was keeping him in rather ignoble bondage. It was not as if she loved him. She was being selfish and material. But what was it to her? She was not Hungarian! She had troubles and difficulties of her own. What did it matter to her!

There were happier times, days together when Tibor was content. Then they walked all afternoon over the hills or laid down amongst the wild flowers of the Janos Hegy and watched for hours the Duna, as she now thought of it, winding far below them in the golden haze.

Sometimes to escape the posts, Jill arranged that they should picnic in the country. She loved these excursions, yet, though those sunny afternoons of early Spring were strangely peaceful there seemed to her something fatal in their loveliness. Northwards the Russian storm-clouds mocked them. Somewhere behind the mountains those vast unseen forces were stirring and working. The Spring had come and even up there the snows must be melting.

In the old War-Office days Bolshevism had seemed to her in some way indefinably comic, like a large drunk man trying to climb non-existent stairs. At home it had given a new jargon to labour leaders: no one understood it. But even in feeble, futile Vienna, after she had seen a bread riot, she had visualized other possibilities. Now the thing had grown to be a terror to her: it menaced her near future. If it came now, it would sweep away her newly won security, just as the war had destroyed the old one.

In England people did not understand. In Paris the important ones of the world were still playing at card-houses, tearing up maps and forgetting to make new ones. And over there beyond the snows were the Bolshevik



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hordes, massing, marching, preparing. Alone, amidst the ruins of history, Hungary stood, still faithful to the past. On her they would all turn.

If the avalanche came, she could not hope to hold Tibor. He would be gone, and with him her future. Bolshevism had become a personal danger to her. Such things hit women hardest, she thought. To men there was at least excitement, but for her . . . Oh, for peace ! If only there could be peace ! Even now it would not be too late for her. If only there could be peace . . . for another six months.

But even dining in the little restaurants on the Janos Mountain the fear of it was with her. Even in the still night air, when the candle flames never flickered and Budapest stretched below them, a fairy city, traced in light, she could not escape it.

Politics . . . Bolshevism . . . Reaction . . . Red terror . . . White terror . . . War . . . Treaties . . . Plébiscites . . . Politics . . . Politics . . . How she hated them all ! She had lived with them in Vienna, hour after hour, worked at them till her eyes ached, had listened to them, taken them down, made *précis* of them and had filed them. They seemed harmless enough then : games for Governments. But now she understood. How was it that every one else did not ? That awful force in the North was not a thing you could play with, check by protests and temporizations.

Even now the thaw and slush of the Polish roads were all that held it back. Soon they would be dry, passable. She seemed to know them all, as if she had journeyed over them for months together, avenues of approach, L's of C. lateral communications : she had traced them, described them, typed them, duplicated them, despatched them. And they were all that kept it back ! And there it was, shaggy, immense, tottering, ready to shuffle down and end everything.

She could not forget it, like the people at home had : she had lived with rumours of it for too long. It was there now, just beyond the forests and the plains, beyond the mountains, whispering, watching.

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Across the table Tibor was thinking of it too. Now he was biting his lip. She could tell that by the slight movement of his moustache. He was impatient, fretting. She would never be able to hold him. Even at this moment he was forgetting her. His thoughts were far away, scouring over the frontiers.

Over the frontiers ! whence only rumours came : over the frontiers, what was happening to his countrymen, to all who were loyal to the old faiths, to his friends, his own kin ? Those silent encircling barriers, where passports were the keys, passports or money or a man's own daring. So often she fancied him forcing them, thundering down the empty road lying on his horse's neck with a thin whistle of bullets about him. Would he do it ? Would he do it ? . . . and always the clatter of hoofs.

There was no pleasure in life if one let oneself think like this. No, no, she must not ! She drew her cloak closer round her shoulders and sipped the sticky Tokay. Could there be magic in it to make one forget ? Could there be ? Perhaps ? . . . Yet he had emptied his glass and there he was . . . thinking of it again.

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Then one night came, that seemed to Jill must be the beginning of the end. They had returned from the theatre and were lying on the big divan : only one shaded lamp was alight and Jill was almost asleep. Suddenly there was a knock on the outer door of the flat, Jill sat up with a start. What could it be ? The air had become all at once electrical. Was it her imagination that created the idea, or could she hear some one panting outside in the passage ?

Tibor was unchaining the door now. How slow he was, one bolt : two bolts : it was open now and there were muttered words in the passage. From the divan she could see nothing. Tibor hurried back into the room, switching on another light as he passed. Some one hesitated on the threshold and followed him shamblingly and stood by the table. The light from the chandelier fell full on the new comer. He was very young ; little more than a boy, horribly dirty and ragged. His grey military jacket

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was all tatters and one sleeve was only hanging to the shoulder of it. His rough canvas breeches were coated with mud : he wore no boots and his legs and feet were swathed with torn grey puttees. There was grime round his eyes and one downy cheek was covered with dried blood from a widely opened gash in it.

He stood there with his close-cropped head bared and both hands engaged in fumbling with his soft scarlet cap. Tibor, kneeling on a chair and leaning on the table, was asking him questions in a low, earnest voice. The boy answered with gestures and uncouth sounds. Jill had no idea of what they were talking. Presently, in answer to a question, the boy nodded and indicated the gash in his cheek. Tibor moved over and holding the boy's head between his hands examined the wound. Then he shook his head as if to say that he did not think much of it. After a time the boy undid his jacket and shirt and produced from within a grimy folded note. Tibor opened it and sitting down at the table began to read it. He pored over it and then sat for a long time, his chin in his hands, in silence. All the time the youth stood awkwardly watching him and waiting. Minutes passed and to Jill the tension increased.

" Shall I get him something to eat ? " she asked. The boy started violently. Evidently he had not been aware of her presence. He steadied himself and regarded her sheepishly. Jill, conscious of his gaze, pulled her skirts down over her knees.

" Yes please," said Tibor. " I forget. Give him something to eat and some wine, he is very tired. A kind ver-ry little Jill."

She spread the table and tried to make the boy sit down, but he was so shy that he tried to eat standing, till she took him by the shoulders and forced him into the chair. When she had done this she went back to the divan.

" Good little Jill. I shall be busy all to-night. Will you not go home to bed ? " Tibor said without looking up.

She found her cloak and, feeling neglected and ruffled, crept from the room without a word.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Nem, Nem, Soha

**I**T was only a few days afterwards that the great procession of protests against the treaty of the Trianon took place. Tibor had been working feverishly at the preparations and on the morning of the appointed day he called for Jill at the Ritz before nine o'clock.

Outside in the streets there was an air of melancholy and to her there seemed a premonition of disaster. Light rain had fallen during the night and the skies were of steel and iron. The Vaczi Utca was full of crowds, muttering and whispering. All the shops were closed and across the roadway great black banners of national mourning hung.

Tibor led Jill up by-ways to avoid being delayed amongst the detachments of the procession, which were forming up in the big open spaces and in the wide thoroughfares. They passed through narrow alleys and low quarters, travelling parallel to the course of the Rakoczy Utca, the route of the procession. The backs of the tall buildings facing on to it hid from them the number of spectators already thronging the way, but as they passed side streets and arches they heard the dull, despondent murmur of the crowds. Jill held tightly to Tibor's arm. Never had she known a sense of general calamity more ponderous.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To my tailor's," he answered. "He has his shop opposite the palace of a relative of me, where now is the French Mission. It is a pity that the procession passes any Entente houses, but it is in the chief street and it cannot be helped. I voted against it, even so, but it made no good."

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They passed under a dark archway and mounted some stone stairs to the second floor, where Tibor opened a door and they passed into what appeared to be a work-room. A long, bare table ran along the centre of it and against the wall, furthest from the windows were bales of cloth, piled on the floor. At one of the windows were many of the cutters and tailors : at the other two tall stools. Jill sat down on one of these and looked out on to the street.

The wide concrete roadway was clear and empty, but the pavements were packed, as far as she could see in both directions, with waiting crowds. Huge black banners drooped dolorously from house to house and most of the windows were draped in some way. These forlorn decorations stirred lazily in the soft air.

It was just like waiting for a funeral, Jill thought. The tailors at the other window fidgeted but no one spoke ; the constrained silence grew oppressive. She wanted to say something to break the spell of it, but could find nothing to say.

"When will it begin ? " she asked at last. Her voice sounded hard and out of tune.

Tibor shrugged his shoulders slightly ; he was watching the house opposite.

"Look, you can see some of them," he said. "I hope they will not come to the windows : one would have asked them, but they might have been insulted."

She looked across at the great, grey house, that was a copy of some Florentine palace, she thought. An enormous Tricolour hung from the flag pole before this central window, the single gay relief in sight. Through one of the open windows of the first storey she could see some French officers in *bleu horizon* uniforms. They too were waiting, standing in uneasy groups in a drawing-room, that seemed in dust sheets. By the fire place was one alone, his face turned from her, but his whole appearance seeming familiar. When presently he turned, she recognized him as the French General who had been in Vienna, and who used to have meetings, official and un-

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official, with her old Chief, often several times each week.

At these meetings she had sometimes been present to take down notes or to look up old letters. The policy of the two missions had not infrequently differed, but she had grown to like the fiery old soldier. It had been amusing to watch him and General Hawkins together ; they were of such absolutely different character, caricatures of their national types. The Frenchman far more quick and intelligent, using all sorts of conversational finesse, which were completely wasted on her chief who had much horse sense, but who was maddeningly slow.

During these discussions the French General grew each moment more distrustful, the English more puzzled. Then a chance word would bring the discussion to some military matter, and instantly they would agree again and start yarning interminably to each other. She had often watched her General, trying laboriously to explain exactly what he believed, searching even longer for the word he wanted in French than in his own language : often she had longed to prompt him but he plodded along through his thesis transparently honest and anxious to make clear his point, his elbow on the mantelpiece and the other hand deep in his pocket, nodding constantly to emphasize his sentences. . . . "*Comprenez-vous ça, comprenez-vous ça ? Bon ! Et après ça ? Je crois, je ne suis par certain—pas de tout, mais je crois—*" So careful lest some misunderstanding might arise : the Frenchman, his head on one side, critical, incredulous, even admiring, had hand on his moustache, watching the other from under his splendid eyebrows. Sometimes, when he had thought no one was watching, he would exchange glances with his *aide-de-camp*, a flicker of an eyelash, the ghost of a smile ! He was so convinced that he was watching a consummate piece of acting, over-elaborate but consistent. Oh, he was not to be deceived by this show of bluff stupidity ! "*Mais il est vraiment épatant, cet Awkeen.*" She could fancy him saying it now.

She was genuinely sorry for the grizzled old soldier : he seemed like a friend from the past. If there were a

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hostile demonstration, it would be most distressing for him : and the fault would not be his own, indeed he was believed to be very Magyar-phile ; it was said that he was making a secret treaty : how else should his surreptitious visits to Gödöllő be accounted for. Now he moved away to another part of the room and was lost to sight. Seeing him had reminded her of those early months in Vienna. How kind her old chief had been. He was luckier than the Frenchman, but even if he were in Hungary, the English Mission was tucked away in the prim reserve of old Buda : no procession would pass it.

Two mounted policemen trotted leisurely past. Very far behind like the sound of waves borne on the wind came the voice of the crowd. In the street below people shifted and shuffled expectantly : the unexplainable premonition, so quick and vivid in collective humanity, began to hold them.

Another party of mounted policemen passed, this time at a walk, with horses fretting at the pace. Further down the street the noise grew louder. Jill could hear the tramp, tramp of the procession and then, after a pause the head of it arrived, drab and rather despondent : a column of orderly men, chanting some sad slow song, marching with slow, steady steps, below banners with mottoes, some in Hungarian, some in French, English and Italian : another column, this time silent, more polyglot banners : then a brass band : a column of children, with short shuffling pace and straying attention, and again banners and more banners.

As each detachment passed below they shouted the same vibrant cries, the same sharp sounds repeated, thrown back as echoes by the walls of the houses, and repeated again . . . over and over again . . . "Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Hăwhăh," it sounded to her. In a way it was effective, but she had no idea what the meaning of the words might be. For a time she watched this slow river of humanity winding below her, without recognizing that there was any particular plan in these different flags and distinct parties.

She looked at Tibor ; he was watching the procession

## Nem, Nem, Soha

with the critical eye of one who has planned and altered and rehearsed. She knew that he had worked hard helping to organize it, but she had not expected him to have remained so unmoved by it : after all it was a day of days for his people, a final protest.

She looked down again upon the procession. It was different from anything she had ever seen or imagined : it had a character of its own : the woeful black flags that hung across the street, the slow moving orderly men, the dull measure of their feet upon the asphalt, and the strange repeated cry as they passed the great grey house opposite . . . tramp . . . tramp . . . "Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Hāwhāh" . . . tramp . . . tramp . . . "Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Hāwhāh" . . . tramp . . . tramp . . .

She tried to puzzle out the meaning of the polyglot banners : the Italian she understood some few words of. There was the French one "*Aux Français voulez-vous faire pour l'Hongrie quatre Alsaces*" : then an English one.

Suddenly the plan of the thing was clear to her. These banners were messages to each nation in its own language, and each detachment bore its own inscription.

Many banners bore the arms of cities, gay, gilded and bizarre against the sombre festoons and grey walls. A detachment of black-clothed men in riding boots marched under a banner . . . "Transylvania, for a thousand years Hungarian demands to remain so," another. . . . She had seen things like this in London and Vienna. . . .

The idea of making an appeal in various languages was new to her but how like such appeals were in every country. She was sorry if it was to be tame : she had expected something original. Perhaps processions were always tame, otherwise they might become mobs.

A detachment of priests filed by, under banners of their churches and, . . . "Hungary that for centuries saved Christendom from the Turk."

Then a gap followed.

"They are going too fast in front. I was afraid of that," Tibor said to her, but presently the next detachment came, stepping out and a little disorganized. . . . "In



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the empty places of Magyars who died for Europe we gave refuge to the Roumans flying before the Turk. Now they claim our land from us. Do the Belgian refugees claim Kent ? ”

Then came a change in colour, a column of Hungarian noblemen in gala dress, Hussar boots, velvet and brocades of all colours, ermine and sable, fur caps, fur bonnets, fur *shakos*, eagles' feathers and aigrets, gilt froggings, jewelled buttons, jewelled swords and their gold keys on their hips. They are like princes in a fairy story, thought Jill. She had never imagined such magnificence.

Tibor pointed out several friends of his to her.

After these came peasants in national dress, horsemen and farmers of the Great Plain, woodmen from the mountains, sailors from the coast. They were like the finale of some gigantic Russian Ballet.

“They're wonderful,” she whispered to Tibor.

“Our ver-ry good peasants,” he said. She could tell he was feeling deeply.

Each party was from a separate district and each wore the distinctive dress, but all carried banners and shouted the same cry as they filed by. More banners . . . “Woe to the vanquished, but when did Tschekh or Serb or Roumanian conquer a Hectare of our soil.” That was better, Jill thought : she liked that note. . . . “Will you set us under savages ? Those who cut their King and Queen into pieces in their palace.”

Jill began to distinguish the words that they shouted : “Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shăwhăh ” . . . then the tramp, tramp, and then again “Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shăwhăh ” . . .

The inevitable magic of repetition was beginning to have effect even upon her, repetition that could stir or irritate, that convinces or alienates, but which never fails to affect. It was like the Kentish fire she had heard at an election : but in this cry the cadence was even more marked . . . “Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shăwhăh ” . . . tramp . . . tramp . . . again . . . “Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shăwhăh ” . . . tramp . . . tramp . . . Tall houses threw back the wild

## Nem, Nem, Soha

cry ; the first words prolonged, mournful and emphatic, the last two syllables puzzlingly sharp, defined and defiant. It was the sound like that of a bullet passing through some obstacle in its flight. "Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shăwhăh. . . ." She had begun to think it to herself. "Nem was Hungarian for "no," she knew.

"What is Shăwhăh ?" she asked.

"Soha means never," Tibor told her. "No, no, never. It is the cry of the "Awakening Hungarians" who will not that their country is broken to pieces. Nëmm, nëmm Shăwhăh," he repeated almost under his breath.

Jill could feel his emotion beginning to communicate itself to her. She turned to look at him, but he was unconscious of her attention : his brown eyes were very widely opened and the pupils dilated, their gaze was fixed on the house opposite. Though he did not raise his voice above a whisper, his lips moved, as if he shouted at it. With his open finger tips he gripped the window sill. It was when he was excited in that frank boyish way of his, that she liked him best. She laid a hand on his wrist, but he did not appear to notice the caress.

"Nëmm ! . . . Nëmm ! . . . Shăwhăh ! . . . ." What did it all mean, or matter, to her ? Yet the emotion of all around had begun to have its effect on her : her pulse quickened.

Outside in the street the "Nëmm"s" grew longer and more deep, the "Sohas" sharper. The crowd on the pavement began to take up the cry. The volume of sound increased till it filled the street. Pent between the tall houses, the air vibrated with it. One could actually feel the pressure of the sound waves.

"Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . .," dull blows, like waves against a wall, then the "Shăwhăh," rapped out, vicious and explosive.

For a while there were no more peasants in the procession, but black-coated men, craftsmen by the signs on their banners.

Then came another gap in the procession. "Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shăwhăh" . . . the crowd flung across

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the empty roadway. Unlike the last, this gap seemed deliberately kept, for the detachment that ended it was not attempting to hurry its pace. Immediately below the window where she and Tibor watched, they halted and, as at a word of command turned their backs and stood facing the great grey house opposite.

"What are they going to do now?" she whispered, turning to Tibor.

He had risen to his feet and was gazing earnestly down into the street: he had not heard her. Jill stood up and repeated her question in his ear: he shook his head, without looking round.

"I hope they make no foolishness," he muttered.

The procession had ceased to chant their cry, but for a few repetitions the crowd kept up the refrain with diminishing volume. Now all were still. By contrast the silence was absolute. Somewhere a woman called out a shrill sentence ending hysterically in a laugh: then all was quiet again. It was growing exciting. What would happen next? Jill stood craning to see what was going on down there. Her shoulder pressed against Tibor's.

Suddenly as on some signal the men of the procession raised their arms and pointed at the empty windows of the grey house, and immediately the clamour began again, louder and more denunciatory than before . . . "Němm . . . Němm . . . Shāwhāh" . . . Němm . . . Němm . . . Shāwhāh . . ." and suddenly translated. . . . "Non . . . non . . . jamais. . . . Němm . . . Němm . . . Shāwhāh. . . . Non . . . non . . . jamais. . . . Němm . . . Němm . . . Shāwhāh. . . ."

Slowly the crowd picked up the unfamiliar words . . . "Non . . . non . . . jamais. . . . Němm . . . Němm . . . Shāwhāh. . . . Non . . . non . . . jamais. . . ."

The crowd instinct was waking: the spirit of the mass began to take possession of Jill: individuality, associations, identity, had slipped from her as in a dream. She had ceased to be an alien spectator, a single critical mind: her consciousness merged unthinkingly with the others: she had become one with that vast concourse, that

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pointed at the grey unanswering walls and the empty windows. She was murmuring : she was shouting. . . . It was extraordinary, silly, nothing to do with her, were her last personal reflections : but there she was shouting too. "Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Shāwhäh!! . . . Non . . . non . . . jamais. . . . ! !"

The houses seemed rocked by the cry : the room was full of the clamour of it : "Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Shāwhäh. . . ." After a while it grew less. Some leader amongst the students was holding up his hand for silence. The shouting died slowly : the pointing fingers fell. In an empty ring in the street down there, a tall man in a black coat was shouting a speech, turning this way and that in an attempt to reach all. Jill could catch an occasional word : they were Hungarian. In a pause the crowd roared applause.

"What's he saying, Tibor ?" she asked.

He translated such sentences as he was able to hear, but she could only catch a phrase here and there. . . . "The Reds . . . the Bolsheviki will . . . the Bolsheviki . . . and again . . . what is the answer of Hungary ? . . . What is her answer ?"

Below the crowd roared and cheered.

"The Bolsheviki will march . . . enemies on the four sides . . ." and again . . . "the Bolsheviki."

Jill seemed to sense again the stirring of those vast forces far away, watching, waiting : the crowds of the great cities, dull, hungry, angry : and below her here was the answer in the street. This other spirit, the answer of those that held the old faiths. Presently the two would meet and clash again : only this time, in a death struggle. Northwards, westwards, beyond the barriers of the snow, behind the frontiers, in the darkened alleys of Vienna, moving in the night to the red light of torches. There were only the two faiths left now.

The shouting of the crowds had infected her : she was short of breath : she wanted to shout or cry : she could not do anything.

"Go on, Tibor," she whispered.

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"Shall the land be broken up?" he translated.

"Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Shāwhāh . . ." the crowd roared.

She and Tibor were shouting. The tailors at the other window were shouting too: the room was full of the noise of it. This was living, feeling! She did not care for anything else now, only to live and feel. Nothing like this before, ever!

"The hour is black," Tibor continued translating. "The land of our fathers calls . . . who comes? Who stays? Who comes?"

The speech was over and the crowd howled its applause. Something in Jill seemed to snap. She was worn out and wanted to cry. She stole away from the window and sat down on a bale of cloth at the back of the room. No one had noticed her movement. She covered her face and began to sob. . . . It was always the same. These great blind forces, strong and striving, were inevitable. She could not escape them. She would be crushed, unnoticed. What had she to do with their quarrels? What had she been shouting for? Mad! Mad! Why had she been born at such an age? First the war; that had robbed her of her home. Now this new conflict; that would take away the chance she had found. Tibor had heard that call. She had heard it. She could never hold him now. Outside the crowd was still roaring.

Presently she looked up. Tibor was still at the window: he had not noticed that she had gone. His face was radiant. It was no good now: she had lost him: utterly: no good now. She knew she could not hold him and she did not seem even to want to. . . . Perhaps she would have told him to go . . . she could not tell.

## CHAPTER IX

### Under Entirely New Management

COUNT ARKOZI had left two days after the procession. There had been no farewell : in the morning when Jill woke, a letter from him had been brought to her.

They had dined together the night before, but he had seen her home to the hotel about midnight. Just before they had reached the door he had kissed her good-night. He had never done so in the street before. She had realized, of course, that he would be leaving very soon, but she had no idea then that she would never see him again. Next morning when she woke there was the note from him on her breakfast tray.

“DEAR VERY LITTLE JILL,” it began,—

“When you have this letter I shall have started on my journey. Where I am going it is better not to tell. When I return I cannot know, not till the Autumn perhaps. Then you will be at your farm, that you and your sister will buy in England. So I do not know that I shall see you ever. Perhaps one day, when the valuta is better, I can afford to come to England to hunt for a little that I liked so much when I was at Oxford. If I do I will write to your bank and will ask if I may see you. That may be, but it is not too likely. I shall think of you often. The big wooden bowl for Jack and the little wooden bowl for Jill I take with me. When I make my work I shall often live in farmhouses or in the fields, without any roof. Then I shall eat and drink from them, the big bowl for drink and the little bowl for the rest.

“I ask that you do not find me unkind that I do not

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say good-bye, but I find it too sad always to say good-bye to anyone. I do not to my mother either.

"You made me very happy, little Jill, and I should have liked to have been with you a long time, but it is not. You know how I am and how I cannot very long be happy. It is not lucky to be so. Now I must do what I must, till I have finished with it. Then if it goes well I shall come again to Pest or by my home. It may be.

"To write of business, I have arranged a credit of forty pounds, English, at the Hitel Bank. On that you can live some weeks, without thinking how you shall do. I send you in this letter a letter to a friend of me, Prince Palugay. I do not leave it open, because it is in Hungarian and you could not read it. It is to tell him of you and to ask if he would care to take the place of me. I tell him all things that he should know. I have found out that he is alone and would like some lady to interest himself. You will not have to talk to him of money. If you care to send the letter he will think it is I who do so. I tell you of him more. He was at Cambridge when I was at Oxford and we travelled to England together often. He speaks English quite well, very much better than me. His family is very good and he is the head and he has no father, but he is not as rich as before because, of his properties, one is in territory occupied by the Serbs and he has no revenue of it. He is not like me. He is good-looking, and he does not make things like I make now, so he will not leave you as I am doing. I hope you will like him.

"Very little Jill I shall not forget you. I ask that sometimes if I can help you, or you have what you would like to tell me, you write to me at my club. Good-bye. Good-bye, very little Jill. You have the key of my apartment, take my books and other things you want. My horse I sell, otherwise you should use him."

"TIBOR."

Jill had been genuinely sorry that he was gone. She had not loved him at all, but he had always been so kind

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to her, that often she had wondered why she did not. She could not imagine that anyone could have made her less conscious of their difficult relationship. She had grown fond of him and she had become accustomed to their mode of living. Now that he had gone she felt lonely.

She considered her financial position. It was only the financial side of these months that she must consider, except for this it must be a gap in life, not a part at all. It was not yet eight weeks since she had taken the irrevocable step, but she had now two hundred and fifty pounds to her credit; she was well ahead of her schedule. That was good. Otherwise the situation did not bear thinking about.

She ought to send that letter to Prince Palugay at once, she realized that. Every day she delayed was a day wasted, was putting off the time when she would have made enough money to return home. The sooner the better! Yet for several days the letter remained unposted. It was silly to try and be delicate about such matters, but to take a new lover so soon would seem unbearable, horribly sordid and indecent. Did the real professionals ever feel like that? she wondered. It was no good doing things by half measures: she ought to look at things from a purely material point of view. It was no good indulging in sentiment at this stage: it was too late.

Yet for a week she took no step. She wandered fretfully about the Embankment till it was time for the cinemas to open. She had never seen so many films in her life as she did during that time when she was summoning up the necessary determination to despatch that letter. She smoked innumerable cigarettes. Each morning as she strolled about the Vaczi Utca she was tempted to go into Roth Margrit, where she bought her hats, and console herself there: and then at meal times she stinted herself from panic, lest she should not save quickly enough.

Eventually when she had sent the letter, she had done so more to escape loneliness than from any practical



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reason. That was on a Monday: Tuesday passed, Wednesday passed, and no answer came to it. She began to grow frightened. Perhaps the Prince was away: perhaps he did not wish to enter into any arrangement of that sort. What should she do if he never wrote? How could she find anyone else? Was she to sit in the restaurant of the Ritz like those other women, and try to attract likely looking men until she found one who was willing to take her as his mistress? It was horrible! Somehow she had never thought of this aspect of such a life. She had considered what she must sell, but not how she must find her market.

All her life, even in conversation, she had a horror of risking a rebuff. She could expand instantly, if she were encouraged, but she had always waited for others to take the first step towards intimacy. This trait made the prospect of having to attract any man's notice doubly repellent to her. Yet now she had gone so far she must pursue this life, till she had bought her freedom: she must force herself to do anything that was necessary. But would she ever be able to, amongst the men with whom she might strike up an acquaintance, find anyone rich enough to pay the price she needed? She did not doubt now her capacity to earn her living in this way and, to save money, but if she could only save some twenty or thirty pounds a month, it would take her a year, perhaps two years, to win the price of her future. By then the chance of buying the farm would be lost, and by then she would have become too soiled and battered to be able to take up again her life. This one would have become her real existence and the other merely her past.

Then, if she went back to England afterwards, she would never be able to forget what she had been. This would have become for ever part of her life, not a gap in it she had determined it should be. By then she would be beyond hope of recovery, *déclassée*. Oh, not even that, deeper, utterly degraded, simply a prostitute. She was on the brink now: soon she would be slipping, slipping. It would be better to go back to England at once and to

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whatever future waited her and abandon any hope of the farm and what it meant. But to go back now, fallen from virtue, and a failure even at that! Her very bank balance would mock her. It would be as much a token of her incapacity as it would be the price of what she had lost. No, if Prince Palugay did not answer, she must find some other man.

Oh, why had not Tibor thought of this and left her other letters. He had been so absorbed with his ideals and doings of his own. He simply had not thought. How could men be . . . life was so unfair, the hardest share always to women. He was going out to pursue some adventure, and she had to stay and struggle for the right to security.

Yet he had not been unkind, never. And she had two hundred and fifty pounds in the bank. Letting her thoughts run away with her like this would make her bitter: she had a horror of that. She must pull herself together and keep up her courage. Perhaps the Prince would write to-day, perhaps to-morrow. She must wait another week.

All Thursday she was in a passion of restlessness. In the morning she tried to read, but could not. She went for a walk: she would walk along the river to the Gallert Bridge, cross by it and home by the Lanczhid: but before she had gone half a mile she was assailed by the desire to return and see if an answer had come from Prince Palugay. She walked as far as the Bridge, but she did not have enough determination to cross the river.

As she tidied her hair before going downstairs to the restaurant she thought her cheeks looked thinner. There was a slight shadow under her eyes. This would never do. She could not afford to look other than her best. It was the first time that she realized how passing a thing is the evanescent beauty of youth. It deepened her depression.

After lunch the hoped-for message arrived, a note, on the very small envelope of which was an embossed coronet. Within was written in perfect English, on the back of a visiting card,

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"MY DEAR MISS MORDAUNT,—

"Count Arkozi has written telling me that you are alone in Budapest and about you. I returned from the country last night or I should have written before. I should like to see you. I am leaving this on my way to play tennis at my club on the St. Margaret's Island and shall drop in to tea at your hotel on the chance this afternoon.

"MICHAEL PALUGAY  
(Palugay Miklos)."

She was much relieved that he had heard all about the conditions ; and she did not think he would come to see her unless he was serious in the matter. Oh, it would be all right now. There was nothing really to worry about. She had allowed herself to be upset about nothing. Then she began to wonder what sort of man he would prove to be. She had not much to go by. He must be about thirty : Tibor had said he was good-looking and spoke excellent English.

Would she like him ? Would he be dark or fair ? Then suddenly, and for the first time, she realized that the boot was on the other foot. What mattered was not what she thought of him, but what he thought of her. She was going to be interviewed and chosen on her appearance, like a barmaid. The idea made her feel hot and angry ; but it was no good. This was part of the price she was paying for security. After all he was going to pay her a high price : he naturally wanted to see her first. He wanted to see if she were really pretty, whether her figure was good. Oh, it was horrible. She was not even going to be interviewed like a maid, but "vetted" like an animal. She fancied someone watching her, taking stock of her, apprising her ankles, her shoulders, her . . . oh, it was beastly, beastly. She wished he were not coming. No, not that ; but that it was all over. Walking out of the restaurant she felt as if she were utterly naked and everyone there was looking at her.

Five o'clock came, quarter past five, half past. She

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was growing hungry. The waiter hovered more insistently near her table: she ordered tea. Quarter to six, six o'clock came, and still no sign of Prince Palugay. Wasn't he coming? Had he forgotten? Did he think her so unimportant? She was still young enough for her dignity to be easily ruffled. She would not be found waiting meekly for him. He had no right to treat her like this, not yet anyhow. She returned indignantly to her bedroom.

At half past six the telephone bell rang: there was a gentleman waiting for her in the hall. She looked in the glass to make sure she was still tidy. Her recent indignation had flushed her cheeks: she had never looked better. A little mollified she went downstairs.

Just where the staircase descends into the circular lounge hall, it divides into two parts which look down either side of the great open fire-place: here there were curtains, screening the main stair-way: and through the chink between these Jill peeped to catch a glimpse of the Prince.

If he were going to consider her appearance she would consider his first. There were only two men in the hall, a Jew on one sofa, and the man who was evidently waiting for her on the other. He was distinctly good looking and might have been an Englishman, tall, slim with straight features and short moustache and slightly wavy dark hair. She would have preferred it straight. He was dressed in white trousers and shoes and a loose-cut tweed jacket. He lolled in an easy, rather graceful attitude on the sofa: a straw hat and a racket in a frame lay by his side. He was not of a manly type, but still he was tall. She emerged from her concealment and descended into the hall.

"So glad to meet you," he said as they shook hands.

No he did not want tea. She had had tea? Was he late? Oh, he was sorry. No, no tea. Might he have a whiskey-and-soda?

They sat down and began to talk about England. He knew London well and had had a flat in Bury Street for a

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year, not long before the war. He asked her if she knew several friends of his whom he had met at Oxford and afterwards. One man he mentioned she had met at dances, but she thought it better not to say so. He knew a distant cousin of hers too: and he and the "Happy Prince," Bibesco, you know," he added, "I wonder if he's happy now!" He told her how much he had enjoyed living in England, of a little two-seater he had had, and of his tailor. He seemed very interested in clothes.

After a while Jill began to grow impatient. It was all very well to talk about shirt shops and shoemakers, but he had not come to discuss such things with her. Of course it would have been "horrid" to have come straight to the point, as soon as he had sat down: but this endless talking, not even interesting in itself, and which led nowhere, could not be mere delicacy. Then she became aware that he was not really wasting his time: for while he talked, he was taking stock of her. She felt as ashamed as if it were the touch of his hands and not his glance that ran over her, her ankles, her knees, her neck, . . . eugh! She had never felt so ashamed before, not even that first night when . . . there had only been warm firelight then.

"Count Arkozi," he began at last, "told me about you in his letter, you know. He thought perhaps I er . . . he mentioned figures. One hundred pounds a month, he said. One hundred a month is er . . ." He nursed his chin watching his tennis shoes. "Is er . . . a great deal of money. In our valuta, it is er . . ."

Was he going to haggle about the price? Jill gasped. She had not thought it could be as bad as this. She did not feel capable of holding her own. If only this interview was over! She would sooner that he said at once that she was not worth it, and would go away . . . now, at once. She wanted to be alone, to go to her room, and lie down on her bed and cover herself up . . . altogether . . . with all the clothes she could find, to feel less naked.

He had stopped speaking. What was she to do? She looked at him despairingly, but he was not watching

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her. He was certainly very good looking, but his mouth seemed weak and petulant. If only she could once assert herself! She felt sure that if they were much together, she would be able to hold her own. But it was just now, when it mattered most, that he had all the advantages on his side. He could say what he liked, ask any question he liked, look at her like that. It would be for him to decide upon her future. Yet it would be no good being strong afterwards; it was now that her future was being decided, when so much was at stake.

He shifted awkwardly. "Don't you think you might er?"

Oh, what was she to do? Every pound less she accepted would mean longer before she was free. "But you must understand," she began.

"Oh, I know," he went on, "but you do not realize what a huge sum it means in our valuta."

Jill was beginning to feel desperate: she could not tussle on like this. She looked at him again, but he was not looking at her. Yes, he looked petulant: there was a hint of irritation now in his slight frown. What if she tried to be firm, if she tried to wrest the offensive out of his hands. It could not harm her cause much. If he were prepared to give what she wanted he would not be able to go on haggling: if he were not willing to do so, and if he had only come to see if she would take less, let him say so. What she wanted most, at the moment, was to have finished with the interview. She braced herself for the effort. It was now or never.

"Well, of course, if you don't think I'm worth it, then. . . ."

"Oh, it's not that," he broke in, evidently vexed at being rushed in this way.

"Or if you cannot afford it."

"It isn't a question of that at all," he said quite testily. "I haven't as much as I used to, for half my property is taken by the Serbs, but I can quite. . . ." He broke off.

Jill was astonished at the success of this first real duel

## Sweet Pepper

upon which she had entered. She could afford to soften her methods a little.

"Please don't think I'm horrid to worry so much about money," she said. "You see you are master of the situation and I am only waiting for your decision. But do be kind and don't keep me in anxiety. If you want to give me what I ask, just say so, but if you don't we need not say anything more about it, and we can talk about other things."

As she spoke she was conscious that while appealing to his generosity she was flattering his vanity. When she had framed the sentences in her mind a few minutes before, it had been true. She had felt utterly at his mercy but, as she had spoken, she had known that the mastery of the situation had passed into her grasp.

"One hundred pounds," he repeated to himself, nodding and still frowning. Then quite suddenly his brow cleared. "That's all right," he said, looking at her and smiling. "We will have the best dinner the Ritz will give us to-night to seal the agreement. What?"

He called a waiter. "Tell the head waiter that Prince Palugay is waiting and would like to see the *carte* to order a special dinner for to-night."

He was taking it quite well. How quickly he changed his moods, Jill thought.

"What are your favourite dishes?" he asked her. "It is so important to start well, isn't it?"

He was cheerful and laughing. He had quite forgotten the tension of a few minutes before. Jill felt strangely tired after her struggle. She had won, she had gained confidence, but in a way she felt soiled and weathered . . . and, oh, she was tired.

## CHAPTER X

### The Lotus-Eaters

JILL'S life with Prince Palugay was a great contrast to that which she had been living. Count Arkozi had never introduced her to anyone and they had always been alone together. They had lunched and dined at small, usually quiet restaurants, and had spent much of their time in his apartment. He had often been busy and so she had often been alone and had taken meals by herself at her hotel. Out of doors they had seldom strolled about the streets, but had gone for long walks into the country. Budapest is so happily placed that, by taking a tram or by walking, one could reach wooded mountain-side in little more than half an hour. It had been a simple life, not very different from that to which she had always been accustomed.

Now everything was changed. Prince Palugay loved gaiety, and Jill for the first time tasted it. They dined nightly at the smart hotels, the Ritz, the Hungaria and the Astoria. Jill met many of his men friends, four of them lunched at their table at the Ritz almost every day : these formed a little *coterie*, of which she soon became the centre. She christened this group the "Six Musketeers" including Prince Palugay and herself in the number.

They were men of different ages and temperaments, Csaradah, "Baby" Bethlen, who spoke excellent English, and the "Microbe" and "Pussy," both of whom had to talk to Jill in French.

The oldest, Csaradah, was a perfect example of the *vieux marcheur*, something over fifty, well dressed and scrupulously neat : his dark, carefully disposed hair was painfully thin, his face plump, but with eyes haggard with



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dissipation. He was a black sheep of a distinguished family. His tastes were so extravagant and he was so permanently in difficulties, that he had come by now to live much on the generosity of younger men. Thus his manners, naturally ingratiating had become somewhat insinuating, especially when he was in pursuit of a free meal. He lunched almost daily with, and at the expense of Prince Palugay, but often when she was at dinner Jill saw him, strolling slowly among the tables stopping here and there with a remark, and constantly adjusting his eye-glass, as if he was searching for some one in particular, instead of merely anyone who would invite him to join them.

All being considered he earned his meals ; for he was excellent company and seemed always cheerful. Younger men were a little flattered by his attention, for his brother held high offices. Women found him understanding : he had mixed so much with other women, that he had a genuine respect for ladies, which they appreciated. He had no real interest besides living as gay and as easy a life as possible. Jill, who had at first rather despised his weakness, soon thawed to him : he was, she felt, very loyal to those at whose expense he lived. Her youth and freshness were a constant source of wonder to him.

A very different type was young Bethlen, who she soon thought of as " Baby " Bethlen. He was younger than herself, small, and little more than a schoolboy, brimming over with high spirits. He seemed to divide his time between the dissipations of Budapest, which were still novel to him and making adventurous dashes without a passport to his mother's property in Transylvania, which since the Peace had been given to Roumania. No day seemed to be long enough for him, and he prided himself on how few hours he slept : yet he found time to study for the diplomatic service examinations. How he managed to work and play practically without sleep, Jill could never understand. He was never tired and was always eager for some new amusement.

He when he was in Budapest, and Csaradah were

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always the first to arrive at the luncheon table, and for some time, they, Miklos Palugay and Jill were together. Then presently looking up she would see "Pussy," she never could remember his real name, standing by the glass screen at the door, watching them. He always remained there, wreathed in smiles like the Cheshire cat, till his presence was noted : then, as if he had received his cue, he would wander circuitously amongst the tables towards the others. On arrival at the table he would stand for some time, to be chaffed : but for every remark that was made he had an answer ready, which he followed up with a fat comfortable laugh in which the others joined. He was evidently a wag, but as his pleasantries were usually in Hungarian, they were lost on Jill. His French was good but he spoke no English. His good humour was extraordinary and nothing delighted him more than to be teased in any language, even if he did not understand what was said. He laughed more than anyone she had ever known : even his own size was still a source of amusement to him. It was only on the days when he was absent that she appreciated how much the party depended on his gaiety.

Always the last to arrive was the "Microbe," an artist who lived on his painting and in part on his reputation as a "character." He was perhaps forty, very small, and made on a most delicate scale. He was a great dandy, always dressed in the height of fashion, and was one of the best known personalities in the capital. Even in Budapest, where men's shoes were as good as in England, Jill always noticed how well-fitting and beautifully polished his were. Easily the most remarkable thing about this minute person was his nose, which was hooked and immense, and to which the rest of his head seemed dependent. A black protruding moustache gave him the appearance of some scraggy bird, which his black, beady eyes accentuated.

Like "Pussy" he made positive capital out of his peculiar appearance, for he delighted in caricaturing himself. He had a great gift of making thumb-nail

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sketches and at meal times was for ever illustrating his conversation on the backs of menu cards and even on the table-cloth. Most of his drawings were extraordinary funny. He was not of the "Society" with which he mixed, nor had his talent as a painter helped him to enter it, for no other of the "Musketeers" knew or cared a fig for Art, except the Prince, who had an insipid weakness for pornographic book-plates. He had won his position by his individuality, his powers as a mimic and his drollery. This, however, was only one side of his life, for he painted assiduously. He painted many of the posters which were to be seen in the streets, and if he helped his earnings by lunching at other people's expense, he was always willing to be their jester, and if in these hard times he could not maintain himself by his Art alone he lived by his wit and not by his wits : which is a great difference.

This little society pleased Jill immensely, and to be the hostess of it gave her a sense of being some one in the world ; and she liked carrying on conversations in French. Never before had she had such beautiful clothes, for Prince Palugay, although he had made difficulties about the financial terms of their relationship, was always anxious to give her new hats and dresses. It was at this time that she had her first real low evening dress. Above the waist it had consisted of little more than two straps which narrowed to a thread of pearls on her shoulder, and only widened again just enough to achieve decency.

Miklos had taken her to Reuters and had chosen the frock for her, and at the time she had been so excited by the lights and mirrors and piles of brocades, that she had never considered how she would look in the dress. A tall, dark-skinned mannequin had looked lovely in it, she thought. What a pretty back she had to be sure. Jill had never before bought a dress at a shop of the class that employed mannequins. At the fittings she had not been able to guess what the frock would look like when finished ; besides she had been greatly overawed by the fat lady with a mouthful of pins ; but when it had been sent home and she first put it on for dinner, she felt so little dressed, that

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she swathed her shoulders with a scarf. Even then, when she entered the restaurant she was still very conscious of them. She was very proud of the dress, and during dinner her self-consciousness and the scarf slipped away. Afterwards as she left the restaurant she was astonished to see her reflection in the looking-glass screen. She had forgotten how little clothed she was above the waist: her hands crossed on her bosom might have covered as much: but how pretty her neck and shoulders looked. The dress seemed to give her height and stateliness, even if it robbed her of her air of girlishness.

Another factor besides her new frocks which contributed to deaden her consciousness during those weeks, was that she was often able to dance. Miklos loved dancing, and two or three nights a week he used to take her after dinner to a small restaurant by the Danube, where in a private room they could amuse themselves all night. At these parties she was the only woman and had four or five partners to dance with; for as well as one or two of the "Musketeers" some other men often joined them. She enjoyed herself immensely and the dancing, especially towards dawn, was of a very boisterous sort. One man after another would "cut in," so that sometimes she danced without a pause till she could scarcely stand.

At these entertainments very much wine was drunk, and Jill herself, who was not used to much at all, often found the Reckitt's blue and sulphur yellow walls rocking mysteriously to and fro after she had broken away from a partner. The floor was really too small and the two musicians played very badly, but Jill determined to drown any regrets in feverish enjoyment.

The parties seldom broke up before four or five o'clock, and after them Jill used to go back directly to the Ritz, which was scarcely more than a stone's-throw away. On other nights she used to go and stay at the Prince's apartment till the early hours. As a result of this mode of life she used to lie in bed very late in the mornings and sometimes arrived downstairs only just in time for lunch.

Beyond playing tennis at his club Miklos did not take

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much exercise and when they did go for walks together it was only to do some shopping or to go to and from a restaurant.

Jill missed the long tramps on the Janos Hegy ; since Tibor had gone she had not once worn country clothes.

The Prince always dined in restaurants, so she had to wear a hat every evening. The poor old black lace one, that she had made herself and of which she had once been so proud, had long been discarded : now she had many to choose from, but she often wished she could stay at home in her teagown and slippers and cook herself supper as she had done in the flat above the Danube.

## CHAPTER XI

### On Rigole

THE climax of this epoch of Jill's career was a party which the "Microbe" gave in her honour at his studio. It had long been discussed and he had expended much money and trouble to make it a success. First of all the "Musketeers" and some friends dined at the Gallert and then afterwards repaired to the tall block of buildings, at the top of which his *atelier* was situated.

When they had climbed the many echoing stone stairs that led to the studio, they found the gipsies, muffled and disconsolate waiting in the cold outside the door. The "Microbe" entered it and Jill followed Neszl Caja, a well-known musical comedy actress who had dined with them, into the flat. The rest of the party remained talking with the gipsies.

Jill found herself in a large long room, such as she had never seen before, and for a moment or two she stood still, looking about her and taking it in.

It was dimly lit by rose and pale blue electric bulbs that glinted through the pierced metal-work of hanging sanctuary lamps, of strange designs, some Italian, some Russian, some Oriental. These cast deeply shadowed patterns on the ceilings, the walls and everything in the room. The walls themselves were hung with ancient brocades mostly of a now subdued rose tint, a few praying rugs and some Slav peasant embroideries. The windows, which were all on one side, were low and broad, and were just below the roof, far out of reach.

On the floor was some dark, soft covering and, as the furniture stood against the walls it seemed very wide and open. At the end of the room opposite Jill was a dais,

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with a carved Italian chair on it and a large easel before it. Around the walls several twisted rococo columns, divans, sombre, formless and abetting, and a gilt shrine, tarnished and mellow.

The furnishing of the room was bizarre to Jill who, though without being specially subtle, was always quickly sensitive to atmosphere. She felt that these incongruous details had been carefully blended to create some definite effect : that this had been achieved, but what the meaning of it was, she did not know. The hushed emptiness, the rich subdued colours, the dim, polychromatic light, the brooding shadows reminded her of something.

"Let us come," said Neszl Caja in German. "The men are waiting outside so that we can tidy ourselves. I will show you. I've been here often."

She laid a friendly hand on Jill's arm, and a too marked emphasis on often. How cold her fingers are, Jill thought. I suppose she is being nice to me, because she thinks I'm a new recruit to her world. Anyhow it did not matter.

Jill turned round and saw behind her the key to what she had not understood. The room was intended to have the appearance of a baroque church : she realized it at once now. Across the back of the room, some feet above their heads stretched a beam, in the centre of which stood a carved Madonna. Dividing the further part of the room behind it from the rest, was a screen of slender wooden columns like the railings of a cathedral choir. These ran out from either wall, reaching to meet the beam. Between these was an opening through which Jill could see, just where she would have expected an altar, a low bed mounted on another dais. On either side of the head was a tall candelabrum, and at the feet two figures of baroque martyrs in painted wood. Above the brocaded bed glowed a sanctuary lamp.

Jill had never mixed in the world where such things as this are often used for secular decoration. The few studios she had been into had been rather poor workshops, slightly tinged with Orientalism or with a frank Futurism. This was the first time that she had come

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across the symbols and spoils of the church in such potentially compromising circumstances: and she had never guessed that there could be any possibilities of the sensual in the trappings of religion. To her the tense writhing figures of the martyrs and the calm, enigmatic Madonna seemed to have taken on a secondary meaning. The idea troubled her and woke in her half-understood hints of something deeper. She was glad when the actress switched on a plain white light and disclosed a little *cabinet de toilet*, hidden among the hangings.

The gipsies slunk in and arranged themselves on the daïs and the evening's amusement began. "Pussy," who had till then been unable to talk to Jill, asked her to dance and made himself very pleasant. The Prince and the actress danced together, very wonderfully, Jill thought. The "Microbe," mounted on the tall Italian chair and armed with an immense paint brush, pretended to conduct the orchestra: Csaradah and a young Count Teleki sat talking on a divan. Later Count Teleki cut in, as was usual, and danced with Jill till the gipsies ceased to play dance music.

Then for a long while the party lay on divans listening to the Hungarian melodies. All the lights had been extinguished except one, that threw a single beam like a shaft of moonlight over the leader of the gipsies. Jill, at full length supported by her elbows, sipped her wine and watched the musicians. Everything to-night brought back the memory of that first Hungarian entertainment with Glory and Tibor: yet how different that one had been: that one had been a party for ladies and this for cocottes.

Miklos was leaning across her, his elbow on the divan but much of his weight resting on her waist: on the same divan just behind her Csaradah, now grown half tipsy was crooning the music to himself while the "Microbe" poured him out more wine. Across the room in the darkness three forms on the other divan were linked in some complicated embrace.

The leader of the gipsies was playing to Jill. Half lost in the music, she watched him languorously through half-



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closed eyelashes : how strange he seemed in this shaft of unearthly light. He was like some recurring vision in an endless dream, half real, a symbol of the music, not its creator. If she shut her eyes only it remained, if she opened them he again existed. She was conscious, as she had been that other night, of a curious certainty that time had stopped, that the music had absorbed all consciousness, joy, suffering, melancholy, bliss ; that she could only feel the emotions that the music expressed. It had been a magic, but had become the universe. Before her, swaying slowly in this blue moonlight, was the magician who had become slave of his magic and so was now like herself but a shadow of it.

Suddenly the spell snapped like a taut wire. Rap ! Rap ! Some one was knocking at the door. The leader broke off, many lights were turned on and the " Microbe " went to see who was outside. For some obscure reason every one seemed to be emptying their glasses, while the gipsies, blinking like owls in the crude light, shuffled their feet.

Jill could hear greetings and cheerful exclamations and the " Baby " Bethlen, the only one of the " Musketeers " who had been absent, appeared from behind the hangings that screened the entrance. He was in riding clothes, very hot and dishevelled. He came over to Jill and kissed her hand. " I've just got back across the frontier," he said. " Such a time I've had. I got caught by the Roumanians and thought I was ' all up ' ; but here I am. I'm starved ! Is there any food ? "

He turned to the " Microbe," who produced a table, cold meats, fruit and innumerable bottles.

The " Baby " sat down and began to eat ravenously. He was still very excited : his colour was high and his eyes sparkled. When he had satisfied his hunger a little he told his story, in short sentences between each mouthful. The men crowded round him except old Csaradah, who remained seated. The gipsies, leaving their daïs, drew near and punctuated each of the Baby's disjointed sentences with exclamations of wonder and delight.

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As he spoke in Hungarian, Jill, who could not understand, sat cross-legged on her divan, watching. A nice boy, the "Baby." He was just like some English schoolboy who had been in a scrape, only his scrapes were big things, international incidents, matters of life and death: perhaps he was making history. That was what she envied the Hungarians: in their world one could achieve something by his own effort; a smaller country, where deeds loomed bigger, individuals were not lost in the vast machinery. Anyhow the Baby was safe now, whatever he had been through: there he was, very hungry and in very high spirits.

He filled their glasses, and the gipsies drank his health. Then they all began to sing some strange song, and one by one took up their instruments and began to play. They crowded round the "Baby," who, standing on a table and steadying himself with a hand on Miklos's shoulder, shouted wildly the words of the song. Every one was shouting: the noise was deafening. After a time the exultation waned, one tune led to another, the groups dispersed, the gipsies retired to their daïs, the white lights were extinguished, and in the tinted gloom the drinking began again.

The "Baby," however, remained excited. He danced the *czardas* with Neszl Caja till they dropped exhausted on the floor. Young Count Teleki executed some wild *pas seul*, which seemed to Jill Russian, while "Pussy" beat time with spoons on a metal tray. Csaradah, glass in hand and now alarmingly unsteady, hovered near, trying to find support for his shoulders against the loosely hanging curtains and puzzled at his failure. Later he asked for more wine and some one by the table threw him a full glass. He dodged with unexpected agility.

Then commenced a game, which at this hour of the night Jill thought vastly entertaining. An ice-bucket was placed at one end of the room and in turn each man after drinking a toast tried to throw from the other end of the room his wine glass into the bucket. It was like a lunatic's game of quoits, in a way absurdly exciting. In the

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strangely lit room the glasses flashed red, blue and silver like gigantic bubbles in their passage through the air. When they fell they crashed suddenly into jewelled fragments that lay rocking, glittering on the dark carpet.

A dance followed this destruction, and after that the young Count Teleki and "Pussy" fought a strange duel by throwing their slippers at each other. Then some lamps, more glasses and more bottles were broken by the slippers and those dodging from them: but it was amusing to watch. After this the two young men, wearied of this warfare and attention, turned again to the gipsies, who as soon as their music was being appreciated, woke from a mechanical rendering of an accompaniment and began to apply themselves to their Art.

The men drifted from one group and interest to another, so that sometimes one and sometimes three or four were huddled together on the divan beside Jill. This led to an experience which to her was unpleasant. Lying face downwards watching the gipsies, she had been conscious of the attentions of an adventurous hand. Supposing that it was Miklos, she had not given the matter much thought, till suddenly she recognized him at the other side of the room drinking with Neszl Caja. She drew herself quickly away and without turning round. She pretended not to notice. Things like that happened if one lived her life, she realized; but the incident spoiled the rest of the evening for her.

When Miklos came back again to her divan, she did not feel well disposed to him or any other man, for that matter. Men were beasts! He wanted her to dance the *csardas* with him, but as she still did this badly, she would not try. For a long time they squabbled, she, vexed at being importuned, and he, quarrelsome because he had drunk more than he was accustomed to. In the end he tried to carry her from the divan. Then Jill, losing her temper for the first time for years, turned on him like a vixen and freeing herself ran to the end of the room where, panting from her exertion, she leaned against one of the

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carved martyrs of the bed. The shoulder strap of her dress was torn and she was only able to keep herself covered by holding it. She was quite sober and very resolute now. She was furious with Miklos. There he was in the middle of the floor, confused and a little uncertain of himself and his balance, and still asking why she would not dance. He was coming towards her now.

"I won't dance," she said, standing up and preparing to dodge.

He came closer and then unexpectedly Neszl Caja slipped between them and began to take Jill's side.

"Why should she dance if she doesn't want to?" she asked him in German and then went on in Hungarian.

Jill, very grateful to her, sat down on the edge of the bed. Every one seemed to be standing about them: Csaradah, "Pussy," and "Microbe" were all talking at once and the "Microbe," always the perfect host, was trying to create a diversion by waltzing with a large pillow for a partner.

"I'll take you home if you wish," said "Baby" Bethlen to Jill. "I don't mind going now. I'm tired myself. The soldiers chased me two nights."

"Oh would you," Jill panted gratefully. "They seem all to have drunk much too much."

Neszl Caja was by her side, holding out her cape for her, and she and the "Baby" Bethlen bustled Jill past the curtains to the door and out into the passage.

"Good-night," said the actress, with one hand on the door and the other on Jill's shoulder.

"Thank you so much, you were a dear to me just now. Thank you so much," Jill said, and on the impulse of the moment, kissed her.

As she and "Baby" Bethlen descended the stairs the music and the voices in the studio grew fainter and fainter, till they reached the dark, temperate silence of the hall. Outside the streets were deserted. In the sky the first flickers of a grey dawn were breaking the night. The street lamps flickered regretfully: the wind preyed round the empty street corners.

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They passed a big store : across each blinded window long ribbons were pasted and on this was printed in heavy black letters "Nem, nem, Soha !" Jill repeated the words aloud.

"Nëmm, nëmm, Shāwhäh," Count Bethlen repeated in a hushed earnest voice.

They scurried on in silence. When they reached the door of the Ritz, she pressed his hand. "Thank you so much," she said. "I wonder if you will go back there now."

"I wonder," he said.

She pushed her way quickly through the turnstile door. How odd men were !

## CHAPTER XII

### The Gilt Peels

AFTERWARDS, when she looked back on those weeks, the party at the "Microbe's" studio seemed to Jill to have been the high-water mark of her success. Till then she had noticed only the advantages of her position. For a while pinchbeck looks as fine as gold. Never before had she had such beautiful dresses, a store of undarned stockings, nor so much money to spend : never had her life been so full and gay.

Besides these material gains there had been something else that had been more stimulating to her happiness and to her mental growth. This something had been admiration. Ever since her father died, she had been "Poor little Jill who had to work for her living!" "Poor little Jill who had been brought up for something so different."

If she had to earn her living, it was better to forget that she had the right to call this a misfortune.

Since she had met Prince Palugay this had altered completely. She had become the centre of an admiring little *coterie*. From being no one in particular, she had become some one to be envied, some one whose fancies mattered. To Jill admiration revealed delicious depths in life and unguessed possibilities in herself : it stimulated her extraordinarily. She had become all at once the central figure in a group of intelligent men. Five men older than herself form a *salon* to any girl's imagination.

In a few weeks she developed her personality greatly. Her conversation had improved : now she was sometimes witty : an audience is the first step to oratory. She lost her shyness and could even enjoy entering a restaurant. Any physical change in her was slight compared

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with the mental one. She still looked a girl, but intellectually she had become a woman.

If she had had lonely hours in which to ponder over her present, she could not well have been content: but she was working out her future. And all the while she was saving, saving, buying her security. Certainly it was the advantages of her position that were the most apparent to her. The obvious disadvantages she had not begun to experience until after the night of the "Microbe's" entertainment. The influence which produced them had no doubt long been at work, but she had not appreciated it, and so to her it seemed that that party altered everything.

During the first few days there was little to suggest that the tide had turned: yet without reason she was immediately conscious of a subtle difference. Once Jill became depressed it was the tawdry and degrading aspects of her life that became apparent to her. The things that had made her laugh made her blush. Her position among the "Musketeers," which had flattered her, began to make her ashamed. She was no longer a pet but a property. Her self-esteem suffered painfully and her self-confidence began to wane. To walk through the crowded lounge of the hotel she needed brazenness, where before she had needed bravery. In such manner all her qualities began to develop their lower forms.

That is what happened; but the first sign of this disturbing change, or perhaps in a measure one cause of it, was a mere fit of depression to which she woke on the morrow after the studio party.

Enveloping wretchedness was her first sensation. Her head was hot, her eyes ached, she felt as if she had been beaten all over. She was suffering from the after effects of the carouse, wine, bad air, dancing and horse-play. Beastly! She took some tablets of aspirin, smeared her brow with menthol and lay still for a long while on the borderland of miserable sleep. Her head throbbed, her hands were cold. By eleven o'clock, feeling rather better, she rose and took her bath.

The bathroom is not only the birthplace of the apt

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retort, but also of stark realization. In the warm water she pondered over the events of the night before. Certain incidents of the party had shocked her and some had shaken her more than she cared to admit. She had been on an equality with a woman who she knew was common property. An attempt had been made to treat her herself as such. The shame of the remembrance was a physical sensation. She shivered and turned on more hot water.

What did it mean? Surely one did not become a cocotte in a day any more than a farm boy becomes a soldier by "taking the shilling." Yet that was it: it was the beginning: only the beginning perhaps: but she had begun to be a cocotte and other people were beginning to recognize her as one. A harlot! Could she be? Already? Could one change so quickly?

She had thought of cocottes as a class, a class apart. Of course they had become what they were; she knew that; but in some obscure way she had thought of them as having been always predestined for what they grew to be: a class apart, that was it! Surely she could not have become like that. In years she might, but not so quickly. It could not be possible! She had been living the life of one, but she could not actually be one . . . and yet . . . and yet. Oh, it could not be! And yet . . . and yet.

In spite of the warmth of the water she shivered again. Mercilessly, logically, irrefutably, the knowledge forced itself upon her mind. She was a cocotte like the Necker or the Czristincovitch, or Lucie Ghent: different from them as each was different from the other. She was not a lady any more. She was not the sister whom Kitty had loved. She was still called Jill Mordaunt and yet she was not Jill Mordaunt at all. Did the others all feel like this? Did they too feel that they were not really what they had become? She was some one utterly different from the girl who had come down on the steamer from Vienna.

Vienna! How long ago it seemed! Only a few weeks before? No, years! Ages ago! A memory of some



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*previous existence. Yet as she lay quite still and kept* her eyes shut, she could fancy herself back in her office at the Embassy, with the sailor of the Danube Control humming next door and General Hawkins coming in on an awkward tip-toe to ask her to type his reports. Oh, it was not possible! Such a short time ago, practically yesterday. She could not have altered so much in these few weeks. And yet she shivered again at the knowledge that it was true.

In an agony of self-abasement she exaggerated the change in herself: scarcely anything remained that connected her with her old life, she thought; her name, her motive, fear, fear of facing the future. It was not as if she had been tempted by any one or had been driven to the step she had taken. She had funk'd facing life. That was it. She had not been a sinner, only a little funk. No excuse. And she was a descendant of gaunt, evangelical General Mordaunt of the Mutiny, and of the bleak, fox-faced man in the red coat whose picture hung in Aunt Mary's drawing-room: their descendant and gone to the devil . . . that was the phrase . . . through being a funk. These two portraits remained in her thoughts for a while. She found pleasure in the thought of them. The glamour of honourable ancestors threw a faint beam of tragic lime-light on her. Anyhow if the thought of the ancestors she had disgraced brought her any comfort she was entitled to it. It was all they had ever done for her. She laughed bitterly and the sound echoed in the empty tiled room. She rose and stepped out of her bath on to the chilly marble floor. How cold it felt! Even the thought of how horrified Aunt Mary would be did not console her. She could not feel defiant any more. Aunt Mary had won after all. Things were very black.

\* \* \* \*

That day she waited in the lounge for Prince Miklos and any others of the "Musketeers," but none put in an appearance. Doubtless they were sleeping off the effects of the party. At two o'clock she went into the restaurant and sat down at the accustomed table. It seemed

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absurdly big. How forsaken and forlorn she must look! She had not lunched alone for weeks, and to-day especially, she wanted to be cheered and taken out of herself. It was most annoying.

She opened a week-old English newspaper which had just arrived. The waiter was gossiping with a comrade. For a minute or two he paid no attention to her. How aggravating! When he did come he laid the *carte* before her rather carelessly, she thought, and stood waiting for her order. Jill was conscious that he was fidgeting: it distracted her attention. Why couldn't he keep still! He would not behave like this if the Prince were with her.

"Alone to-day . . . Madame?" he asked.

What a bald question! She was used to deference. Perhaps he did not think it mattered how he behaved to a *cocotte*. Had not his "madame" been a little grudging, suggestive of an after-thought? Of course it did not matter what he thought of her. Still . . . still.

She did not enjoy her luncheon. She had no appetite and could not help wondering whether the waiter's manner had indicated some contemptuous feeling for her, or whether it had been her fancy that had misled her. She finished her meal and rose from the table abruptly. Doing so she surprised the waiter. He started hastily away from the hot plate where he had been talking to his friend.

They had been discussing her. Without reason she knew it, as certainly as if she had heard their conversation: she knew the sort of thing they had been saying. She felt hot with shame. How disgusting it was! He had been discussing her and now he knew that she knew it. His haste to draw back her chair had in it something of a sheepish apology. He had not meant her any harm it seemed to say.

Hot and unseeing, she swept past and out of the room. How disgusting! To know that a waiter thought of her like that! Beastly! Beastly! And he had known that she had understood his thoughts. That was worse. It was a recognition of sex between them. She would never

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again be able to think of him except as a man : she knew that he had thought of her as a woman, had praised her allurements, desired her perhaps, lay awake at nights, tossing on a dirty narrow bed thinking of her, lusting after her. Oh horrible ! Oh horrible !

Yesterday he had been a waiter, now he was a man. The porter, the liftman, the page, they were all men ; perhaps they all thought about her like that, considered they had a right to do so, thought of her as unattainable only because she was too expensive. Perhaps in their day-dreams she was one of the things they would possess if they were rich. Now she would never be able to meet any man, whoever he was, without knowing that he might desire her. She would divine hateful possibilities, coarse arms about her, hot, unwashed skin against her own. They would all be men now, all potential lovers . . . Lovers ! She was only a cocotte now and any man had a right to think of her like that, appraising her body through her clothes, imagining her naked. Beasts ! Beasts ! She wanted to go away where no one would see her. Horrible !

Once Jill realized what she had become and how she was regarded, she began to fancy that she saw evidence of the change everywhere. Seek, and ye shall find ! Even amongst the " Musketeers " she was ready to suspect slights in any casual remark or action. She lost her capacity for careless happiness, which had given her ascendancy over them. Often she was silent and preoccupied : she was happy only by effort.

Perhaps the " Musketeers " noticed this, certainly it affected the ways of their *coterie*. She was no longer a source of merriment, and theirs was a society which loved to laugh. The need of creating gaiety fell upon them all : consciously or unconsciously, each cast about to do his share. " Pussy " laughed and gurgled more than ever, he shrugged his fat shoulders and cast his eyes to the ceiling, he often neglected his food ; once he allowed a plate of some special dainty to be carried away before he had finished it. Old Csaradah told stories in a hoarse

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confidential whisper. The French ones were bad enough, the German ones were mercifully mostly beyond her understanding, and the Hungarian ones were unguessable. The "Microbe" played the fool, mimicked, minced, drew caricatures with feverish industry on everything, the *cartes*, wine list, his cuffs, the tablecloth : when everything was covered with his work, he modelled ridiculous figures in bread with peppercorn eyes and match legs. Each of the "Musketeers" took individually a more important part in the conversation to make up for Jill's silences.

The more they entertained each other, the more her power of doing so withered. She had no stock of stories and was no *raconteuse*. If she could not be care free and laugh she was bound to fade into a mere ornament at their table. She tried to shake off her feeling of being on the defensive, she tried to be easy and spontaneous again ; but to herself at any rate, her talk and her laugh sounded forced. When they all leaned forward to catch some whispered impropriety of old Csaradah's, Jill found her attention wandering. Would he tell stories like that before her, if he had any respect for her ? If men respected a woman they were very careful what they said in front of her : that was what she had been taught. Did she believe it ? Or was it only Englishmen, and old-fashioned ones at that, who did ? General Hawkins had always been painfully careful of not shocking her, but then Owen and several other young men she had known had not been. Yet Owen respected her, she supposed : no doubt if he had lived he might have wanted to marry her.

It was silly to expect offence from poor, wicked old Csaradah. One could not fancy him ever talking of anything, except gossip and food and improprieties. "I live only for my organs," he was often heard to say. That was his philosophy. He knew every wine and every vintage, every dish of every country.

"My brother has ruled a nation," he used to say, "and I've only enjoyed the wine, the women and the pleasant things, but when we both come to die we shall be in the

## Sweet Pepper

same boat : only I shall be happier, I think. There have been some chances that I have missed : but devilish few ! A little thing at Fiume, whom I did not trouble about, yet afterwards she became a European beauty, a widow in Wien one very cold winter : but not many. My brother, very likely he will think, if only I had done this or had not done that. For me it is something to have enjoyed three generations of women. The women of forty when I was twenty, their married daughters when I was older, their grand-daughters later. Women and wine and good food and music, those are pleasures we can enjoy to the end : if not all, then some. Blessed be the seven senses ! For others let them interest themselves in what they will. For myself I live only for my organs."

When people discussed politics or books, old Csaradah was always silent and passive, blinking with his beady eyes, scarcely visible between his haggard eyelids. When he was bored the muscles of expression relaxed, his face became flabby, his mouth drooped, he looked worn out and dissolute. Yet, given a little wine and the interest of younger people, he could gather himself together astonishingly. Then he could be the best of company, shrewd, humorous, inevitably the *vieux marcheur*, but not ungraceful in his admission that only the after-glow of his days remained.

"*Enfin, je suis qu'un revenant d'autrefois, mon vieux.*"

No, it was silly to mind his naughty old stories ! He had told them since the first day she had seen him : possibly they got worse, for he had not yet succumbed to senile reiterations and he must have used the more presentable long ago. Oh, he did not mean any harm with his "*chère petite Madame*," and his blinking eyes and his white linen, that seemed somehow part of his wickedness, and his throaty confidences. Poor old Csaradah.

Then there was the "Microbe," he was extraordinarily droll, Nature had given him a head not only too large for his fragile body, but also one like that of an inquisitive bird, a beak, destructive rather than dangerous, like that

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of a parrot not of an eagle, and quick eyes which, because of the importance of his nose seemed to be on each side of his head. He was certainly very comic, but then he liked to be. He was very exact, often over nice in his dress and gestures, a miniature fop. He never made insinuations, and if his manner sometimes seemed to her insinuating, it was perhaps her imagination. He had a trick of clutching her arm, when he wanted to direct her attention : she hated that, but he had done it from the first : he had not changed much : but there it was : familiarity grows !

It was the same with the rest : individually they might be treating her as they always did except that now they had all known her longer, yet there it was. Something very difficult to define. It was not what they said, but what she fancied they thought. Was it that they were taking her for granted ? She could not tell. She was losing her sway over them and, as she lived so much with them, her self-confidence and self-esteem depended much on keeping it.

Alone with Miklos she was happier. She did not imagine that he cared for her, but he was obviously attracted, was interested in how she was dressed and how she looked. He was proud of taking her about. He had been brought up by a doting mother and sister. During most of the war he had served on the staff of his uncle, General of Division, and as one of the military attachés in Switzerland. He had collected, besides the war medals, a number of decorations . . . "cotillon medals" he called them, though Jill knew that he enjoyed wearing them on the 14th of each month, the day when the ex-officers of the 14th regiment held a dinner, at which he usually appeared in uniform. Oh yes, he had always been spoilt, Jill thought, and she did not resent things as much from him as from other men. He was kind and as a rule easy tempered.

Being the mistress of a man whom one does not love is not by any means an ideal existence, but on the whole Jill and he quarrelled very little. He annoyed her at times by his lack of interest in her thoughts and ideas. He

## Sweet Pepper

never wanted to know what she thought of this or that, or what she had done in life, before she had met him. He liked to talk about himself, of his life in England, of his chambers in Bury Street. He was very proud of the little Metallurgique that he had owned at Cambridge, of the hunting he had had, of his knowledge of gay life in London. He loved telling her how he had danced at Ciro's, had been well known at various restaurants. He liked speaking English with as much slang as possible and he liked to mention people he had known by their nicknames, the Lollipop, the V de B, the Lily. He never tired of telling her of a chorus girl with whom he used to sup at the Savoy. "She was a peach," he used to say, "an absolute topper. The times we had! The only girl who ever door-stepped me! But I was only a kid myself then. Those were days! Will you believe it, one night . . ." and so on and so on.

One thing about him that pleased Jill was his appearance. He was always tidy and well turned out, he still had the clothes that Johns and Pegg had made him. He was tall and his figure was good, and in evening dress he was one of the best looking men she had met. It was a pity his hair waved a little, and that his features were quite so regular, she thought. But he had an air with him. She was proud of walking into a restaurant in front of him: women nudged each other and looked at him with evident admiration. Waiters were always obsequious. He knew how to talk to any one, and was able to carry off anything he chose to do. He could order every one about without being offensive, and Jill, who when she had first met him had still suffered from shyness, admired his ease under all circumstances. He had a way of taking everything for granted, which she envied and which, nevertheless, irritated her. He seemed to assume that his position as head of the Palugay family placed him above criticism.

He chose his friends because he liked them, but Jill guessed that at heart he was a snob, and expected some deference from those of them who were not his social

## The Gilt Peels

equals ; yet he was never patronizing and was popular with every one.

To her it seemed a pity that he had scarcely any inexpensive pleasures. He never wearied of elaborate dinners and late hours. He liked feeding at smart restaurants, where every one saw him and noticed Jill's new dresses. An evening with him was very different from one with Tibor. Tibor had taken her to every sort of restaurant, noisy, bourgeois, Bohemian, eating-places of University students and cinema workers, bars where prosperous peasant-proprietors caroused, cafés where brokers whispered over their glasses, and *cabarets* where girls fox-trotted amongst the tables. Tibor had had a knack of sinking into his surroundings and any company : he had been quick to notice, sympathetic to most ideas, curious and insatiably interested in life. Compared with Prince Palugay he had been like some round-headed grown-up schoolboy.

Tibor was as well born as Miklos, but he never seemed conscious of any social difference at all. He was simple and unassuming : he was tolerant of so many sides of life, yet he was never of them. For the present interested him and pleased him, but it could not hold him. He had not been difficult to understand, for he had made no mysteries. Yet that faith, that he could only escape for a little while, had isolated him from other men and women. This faith of his, had seemed to Jill splendid but inhospitable, like a mountain claiming victims, bleak. She had admired his recurrent devotion, but could any one have loved him ? she had wondered. His real interest was too far out of reach, not secret, but only to be shared with those who followed it. Women were supposed to love those who were successful, but could any one love heroes ? Love is so warm a thing, heroism so chilly in its loneliness.

Miklos Palugay had no mastering visions to drive him away on grim, risky errands. Any woman who could please him could hold him. She liked him : he could be jolly ; his experience of the world fascinated her ; he was



## *Sweet Pepper*

*generous to a fault, but she could not love him in the least.*

Neither he nor Tibor had ever stirred her passions. Perhaps she had not any, she thought. Perhaps all that she had fancied and dreamt of in the past, would never happen. Perhaps she would have neither love nor desire. Were all cocottes like that? Was that why they were what they were? Was she like that? No love! No virtue! Only cowardice. Was there no good in her?

## CHAPTER XIII

### And the Necker Nods

**P**ERHAPS a week after the party an incident occurred which set a seal on Jill's new position. If she had not previously realized what her new status was, she would have been shocked: as it was, for some reason difficult to define, she was amused and even relieved by it.

She had been lunching alone in the restaurant of the Ritz. The usual clientèle was there: the table of Italian diplomacy gathered round their astonishing Princess who drooped like a lily over a mountain of spaghetti: the Spanish table where a lean, and bored attaché attended the wife of the minister, a lady whose condition alone was interesting, the table of four English soldiers, where no one ever spoke: the mess of French officers where no one ever listened. The German Baroness, who gave out that she was a spy, sat sipping wine, surrounded by fresh diplomatic *ingénus*. She was wrapped in some preposterous skin, posed and painted to look the part of a villainess of melodrama. She achieved an appearance of infamy so appalling, that Jill was sorry for the poor Italian Princess, who by comparison looked simple and virtuous.

The leaders of the *demi monde* occupied their accustomed tables. Just opposite Jill Lucie Ghent, fair and gentle, nibbled her fruit with downcast eyes: by the wall opposite was the Necker Baby, her impish face hidden by a fur collar so that only her defiant mouth was visible: in the corner the Czristincovitch in a black riding habit and hard felt hat poised her handsome profile on her wrist.

Jill was interested in all these tables. She had had to do with the Italian and French diplomacy in Vienna, and

## Sweet Pepper

now she was one with the cocottes. She remembered still, her shamed curiosity when Glory had first pointed out to her these beauties.

Days ago she had found a counterpart for each in the animal world; for she always tried to discover what animal every one she knew resembled. Lucie Ghent was obviously a tortoise-shell kitten, the Necker a French bulldog, the aristocratic Czrinstincovitch less certainly a Borzoi. Most people were easy to match: Tibor Arkozi was a spaniel, one of those honest brown spaniels which would be friendly and sympathetic, but which one could not hold once it has heard its master's call. Glory was one of those indefinable terriers, with a strain of the bull perhaps, which, after a hard puppyhood, has found comfort in a restaurant, where it is amiable to every one whose plate is full.

There were some people who were difficult to place: General Hawkins had been one. A knight on a chess board was the best she could do for him: it was not a satisfactory likeness, but he looked at one over his cheek bones in just the same way, and he moved too in rather the same manner, two forward and one sideways in each step. In diplomacy his methods were like the knight's. He was unexpected, but had no great range. His mental moves were slow and awkward: he would sit still considering very carefully every detail of what was happening close about him. His opponents, who had begun by suspecting him, had tired of watching him. Gradually a conviction would form itself in his brain: then suddenly he would make his move. Check!

Jill was happier that day, or her fancy would not have played for her. Lately her mind had seemed frozen, but now she let herself be amused by the expressions of the various people as they lit their cigarettes. How people's character, especially national character, showed in everything they did. It had been a favourite theme of one of the attachés in Vienna. She followed up his idea, watching the English soldiers as they "lit up." They did so as if it required much concentration: they were the same

## And the Necker Nods

in anything. "None too easy, you know . . . ticklish job . . . what!" but immediately the task was done they relaxed: work over forget all about it! No talking shop! The French officers lit each others' cigarettes politely, neatly, charmingly and returned to their intellectual tussle. The Italians lit thin cigars with lingering gaze and with an air, as though some deep meaning attached to what they did.

The sun came out and a warm beam lit her table. A nice afternoon for a walk! She had not felt so light-hearted for a long time. How good it would be to walk to the golf links and come back pleasantly tired in the evening.

She signed the folded bill and slipped a tip into it. She must hurry up and change! As she passed towards the door a woman at a table near it nodded to her. She smiled an acknowledgment, before she realized who it was who had greeted her.

It was the Necker Baby.

In the hall Jill paused and lit a cigarette. So she was accepted into the *demi-monde*! Hah! She smiled bitterly. So she was accepted by those others as an equal. She was thankful she had nodded back. She had not been gauche, anyway. There could be no mistake about it now! She had been labelled.

She was surprised how little impression it made on her, but she had tasted all the bitterness beforehand. Indeed she had expected something of the sort would happen, and it might have been worse. She was a *cocotte* now. What did it matter who nodded to her? She felt quite kindly towards the Necker. It was decent of her not to resent a newcomer and a foreigner at that. As it had to be, she was glad it had happened. She was accepted now. Well, she was in the foremost rank of them. That was something.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Claws Out

**J**ILL had just been congratulating herself on how she had schooled her natural inclinations when the blow came.

As she had dressed for dinner, she had been reviewing her position. It was barely four months ago that she had had Kitty's letter telling her about the chicken farm. The six hundred pounds required had seemed such an impossible sum, as unobtainable as a million. When she had taken the decisive step, it had been more from desperation about the present than hope for the future. It was only four months ago, and already she had four hundred pounds in the bank.

While she had been with Tibor Arkozi she had lived so quietly that no one had known about her, but her life with Prince Miklos was so different, that in a few days every one, who knew him by sight, must have guessed that she was his mistress. The realization of her position had hurt her horribly, but latterly she had settled down to a dogged indifference. Two months more, or three at most and she would be free. She had endured so much, that nothing that could happen would now dismay her. She did not doubt her power of holding the Prince. She had not as fine features as some of "those others," but she was younger than any except probably Lucie Ghent. Added to this she was English, and in Hungary everything English had a *chic* of its own. It was not so bad, if she thought only of the future, of when she would be free: scarcely more than a matter of weeks now!

She put on a grey and silver dress, that she had not worn before. Somehow clothes did not please her as

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they had a few weeks ago. They seemed a uniform of her trade. Horrid idea ! As she arranged her hair under the soft brim of her hat, she scanned her face minutely. No, she had lost none of her freshness. A few weeks more could not make much difference. Then she would be free. She would have bought her freedom dearly, but was it not better than spending a whole life of uncertainty and dinginess, growing each year more faded.

In the other life she would have been persecuted as Kitty had been, more, for she was better looking, and younger and had less strength of character.

She draped her ermine stole round her shoulders, scented her hands and garters, damped her eye-lashes with a finger, dropped some cigarettes into an old wooden case that Owen had given her years ago and went downstairs.

They dined at the Mascotte that night, the Prince, the "Microbe," old Csaradah and herself. The head waiter informed them that some bottles of gin, worth their weight in krownen notes, had arrived from London. Should he bring some ?

"I'll make you a cocktail I learnt at Wells," the Prince said, and strolled to the end of the room.

The "Microbe" explained to Jill some poster he had just designed, while Csaradah, his eyes empty, drummed with his finger tips on the table. Miklos returned followed by a waiter with a tray of iced drinks. It was after ten and the restaurant was beginning to fill up. Opposite were some young Hungarian officers, and at another table "Pussy" and an actress, in whom he had begun to interest himself.

Jill lifted her glass. Cold ! and scented of lemon ! She waited for a second, her glass poised. Old Csaradah was blinking a toast to her. She nodded and drank the cocktail.

"Good !" she said.

A *chanteur* came and stood near their table and began to sing some Viennese trifle to her. It was the same tune he had sung the last night that she and Count Arkozi had dined there. Not very long ago ! She wondered what had happened to him. She had never heard since the day he

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left. The "Microbe" was drawing his poster with a fork on the tablecloth and Csaradah was yawning behind his hand. The memory of their toast came to her: "Nëmm, Nëmm, Shāwhäh," the watchword of the Awakening Hungarians. This life of pleasure was rather cheap compared with Tibor's, she thought.

The singer finished his ditty and Prince Palugay filled the wine glass and handed it to him. The man lifted it and bowed to Jill. She nodded and raised her own.

"Nëmm, Nëmm, Shāwhäh," she said. It was one of the few Hungarian phrases she knew. The singer smiled and drained his glass.

Across the room the young officers had heard Jill's toast. One of them rose to his feet, a little unsteadily and bowed to her. "Nëmm, Nëmm, Shāwhäh," he said to her and drained his glass. When a friend at his table pulled him down he looked hurt. A nice-looking boy, Jill thought, and nodded to reassure him. He smiled back delighted.

Jill turned to say something to Miklos and found him glaring at her. Surely he could not be jealous of that little boy opposite! Why he was little more than a child and she had only nodded because she did not like to think of him being grieved when he was drawn down to the table. She made some remark to the Prince, but he looked down and re-filled his glass. Csaradah cleared his throat and began to tell one of his inevitable, improper stories. The "Microbe" improved on this and the Prince followed him: he was a little flushed by wine, Jill thought.

"Did I ever tell you about a little girl called Rosalie I used to live with in Paris and at Deauville?" he asked. "She was like the woman Csaradah was telling us about just now. Do you know those road signs, one of the tyre companies put up at each end of the French villages? Well, Rosalie got hold of two of these and hung them over her bedroom door, one inside and one outside. As you went in you saw "*prenez-garde aux enfants!*" and as you came out: "*Merci!*"

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Csaradah made a note on his cuff: he kept a list of such stories. The Prince told other stories of the same lady. "Oh, I was very fond of her," he said, "but she had a passion for niggers, very degenerate. I haven't got much colour prejudice myself, but I wasn't going to . . ." he rambled on. The "Microbe" listened loyally; Csaradah dozed, recovered and dozed again.

Half the lights had been put out. The room was dim and Jill was glad of it. She hated the way Miklos talked before her about women he had kept. After all she was not like those charmers of Paris. He ought to think a little more of her feelings. More lights were turned out: a waiter brought their coats and wraps to the table. The Prince filled her wine glass with brandy and drank his own at a gulp. The "Microbe" did the same, Csaradah sipped his slowly. His face looked very grey to-night. The blackness under his eyes was more pronounced than ever. Jill tasted her liqueur.

"I can't drink any more," she said and put down the glass.

"Why on earth not?" the Prince asked.

"I don't want to"

"Why?" He commenced to urge her, but Jill rose and was helped into her cloak.

"Why don't you drink it?" he was asking.

She turned and walked to the door. Every one was pouring out on to the pavement. Presently she and the Prince were in a four-wheeled cab: neither spoke. She was conscious that he was angry with her.

Lately he had often dropped her at the Ritz and had gone on to his club to play cards, but to-night he came upstairs with her.

Once inside her room the Prince sat down on her dressing-table.

"Don't squash my brushes," she said.

"Why didn't you drink that brandy?"

"I didn't want it. I told you so."

"Why do you pretend to be so good?" He frowned and dangled his foot. He was still wearing his coat and



## Sweet Pepper

hat. Jill checked herself from asking him why he did not take his hat off.

"Why can't you be natural like other women?"

"I suppose I'm not like the other women you've known. That's why. I haven't had that kind of up-bringing."

"Perhaps you aren't," he said, "but you don't jolly well waste your time any more than they would, when my back's turned, do you?"

There was a weight of insinuation in his tone. Jill turned from the cupboard where she had been tidying her hats.

"What do you mean?" she asked. She was beginning to get angry.

"What about the other night?" He snatched off his hat and threw it viciously into the corner of the room.

"What night?" she asked. She had no idea about what he was talking.

"The night you went home with young Bethlen."

Jill gripped the edges of the cupboard behind her and held to them. How dare he! What did he mean? This would never do: she must keep her temper.

"What are you talking about?" she said.

"You know well enough what I'm talking about," he answered.

Jill, leaning against the door of her wardrobe, gripped the chilly glass handles. Her mind seemed to her colder than her hands. She was more alarmed by her own calm than by his anger. His cheeks were flushed with two red spots, his stare was diffused like that of one drunk. When he was excited his fine regularity of features and the absence of lines about his mouth suggested negative qualities, lack of control, futility.

"Well," she asked, bracing her shoulder to meet his answer, though she still did not know exactly what he was hinting. For a few seconds they stood so, she tense, at bay, he, his muscles relaxed, undecided what to do next. An indefinable background to the silence of the white bedroom, the ceaseless life of the big hotel stirred.

As he stood there, checked for a moment by her reso-

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lution, his vision cleared. His eyes changed their focus and he saw her as she was, her head thrown back, her face pale, the halo of her hair magnified by reflection in the mirror against which she leaned, a hint of tightened muscles under the modelling of her throat and neck. Without either of them guessing it, her beauty posed as if by a fine deliberation against the pale luminence of the mirror became a deciding factor.

Her will, against which he had been fighting had unexpectedly escaped him, dodged him and taken refuge in her body. Cheated! Where had it hidden itself? Behind the grey depths of her widely staring eyes, or there within her bosom where the grey chiffon rose and fell with the quick passing of her breath? He had utterly lost touch with her mind, as utterly as if, in the wrestling of their wills, his grip had slipped.

For a second or two he groped about to find something which he could clutch. Cheated! Her bare shoulders, off which her dress had slipped, mocked him. He wanted to beat down her resistance, he no longer thought of her mind: that did not matter now. What he wanted to do was to pin her in his arms, hold her, bend her struggling, do anything he would with her. He could fancy her writhing to free herself. The independence of her body challenged him.

He started forward to grip her shoulder, but even as he moved Jill had seen the change in his eyes, a clouding, a darkness in his face, his mood softening from anger to mere appetite. In answer, there rose in her a repulsion, or contempt or whatever instinct it is that the desire of a man rouses in a woman who does not respond to it. Repulsion made her move so quickly towards the window, that his clutch missed her, and contempt prevented her from escaping further from him.

His emotion had been physical, but hers was more purely mental than ever. Her anger had not at all abated: she, at any rate had not forgotten what he had been saying.

"What did you mean just now?" she asked.

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He had recovered his balance after the failure to seize her and stood leaning across the narrow glass-topped table that separated them. He moved round it and sat with his back to it before he answered.

"Nothing! I've forgotten. Don't let's fight, dear," he said.

Jill, horribly conscious of his desire, which seemed now an insult, would give no face value to his attempt at reconciliation.

There he was, between her and the rest of the room : she doubted if she would be able to dodge him if he tried again to take hold of her, but she was not afraid, only angry and disgusted.

"What did you mean by saying that I knew what you meant? What did you mean?" she demanded.

He was baffled. Why couldn't she leave it at that, he thought. She was trying to evade him again. When he had cornered her mind, she had cheated him by interposing her body : now he wanted that, it was her mind that confronted him. Why couldn't she have done with it? He wanted to hold her to him, open those parted lips with kisses.

"Nothing important. Come here," he said, and slipped his arm round her.

Jill sprang round and freed herself quickly.

"Do you think you can make beastly insinuations about, I don't know what, and then, when I ask you what you mean, you can paw me about and not even take the trouble to answer me? I . . . think you've been horrid lately, simply horrid, talking about things that must make me feel awkward in front of the others. Then when I ask you not to, you say, I'm a nice one to object."

She drew on her dress which had slipped dangerously off her shoulders, wrapped her stole closer round her throat and turning from him began to tidy her hair in a business-like way. In Prince Palugay, gazing at her insulting back, thwarted desire turned again to anger.

It was like that was it? She could take money from

## Claws Out

him and yet repulse him if she wished. So! He was not to object whatever she did. He was not to touch her. So! Sitting down in the carved and cushioned *bergère* he crossed his legs, taking great care not to falsecrease his trousers.

While Jill was deliberately methodical in the arrangement of her hair, he watched impatiently. At last she turned round and faced him.

"Well?"

He ignored the intimation that she was ready to resume their dispute and, instead of answering, looked her up and down disapprovingly. Her shoulders were covered: nothing of her was visible except her face and her crossed hands, gripping the folds of her stole. She stood waiting, and then as he did not reply, began again.

"You said just now that I knew well enough what you meant. You were insinuating something. I don't know what it was. You had better tell me. Why haven't I a right to expect you to treat me properly?"

Something about his not having bought her soul, too, rose in her mind, but it seemed hackneyed: she did not utter it.

"I'd every right to say what I did. It is I who pay your bills, isn't it? . . . Isn't it?" he repeated.

The question could no longer be treated as oratorical; Jill bent her head in assent.

"There aren't three women in Budapest who get as much as I give you, besides all that . . . is there?"

"I dare say not," Jill admitted in a numb voice. This talk about money did not make her feel awkward, whether he intended it to or not. She had earned what he gave! But this question was horrible.

"I've given you a good time, haven't I?"

"Yes." She had to open her lips widely to make a scarcely audible sound.

"And the way you pay me back is by going home with my friends."

She stood rigid, every part of her was frozen, while the Prince, now perfectly calm and controlled, marked with

## Sweet Pepper

his fingers each point as he made it. She could not tell whether or not he was angry. She herself felt no emotion, but an all-pervading numbness.

"What did you mean?" she asked after a pause. Her voice sounded lifeless and colourless as the walls.

He leaned forward before he answered. Oh, yes, he was angry! And the angrier because he had been restraining himself. She could feel the force of his invective before he spoke.

"What the devil do you mean by pretending you didn't go home with that damned young Bethlen the other night after the party?"

To her it seemed for a moment that she was being blown over, swept away: then quickly she recovered her balance, as with an effort and trial of inclinations one bends to the sudden blast of a squall.

"Do you believe that?" she asked.

It seemed to her incredible that he should. Was this some elaborate, hateful jest?

The Prince curled his lip as if not deigning to answer. Jill's knees felt very weak, but her brain and her will were strong.

"If you believe that, you had better go." Her voice rang with an emptiness that is the shadow of grief. There seemed nothing else worth saying. She was not going to deny the accusation. She was not a fish-wife. If he could believe that he would not believe what she said. She was not going to abuse him or make a scene. She really did not care what he thought. She wanted him to go and she wanted never to see him again: that was all.

That she had not been any longer virtuous had been bad enough, sufficiently horrible. But her virtue had been her own and she had sold it: that had been her own concern. She had had to pay for it and would have to pay, always. It might have been wicked, but it had not been mean. But to be accused of unfaithfulness seemed to her an outrageous insult. She had not been light: she had only done what she had from terror of the future.

## Claws Out

She had loathed it, as she had loathed herself for doing it. To be accused of wantonness !

The Prince sat there, watching her over his joined finger tips.

‘Go away . . . go away,’ she said to him.

It was too late now for him to go back on what he had said. She waited, feeling old as grief, but he did not move.

“Please go away.”

She was not angry any more, only her mind and her voice seemed dead.

“All right. If you’re angry I’ll go,” he answered, and swinging his fur coat over his arm he went to the door. There he turned and looked at her.

If she was angry ! A laugh stirred and died within her. Standing very still she watched him and then the door long after it had closed behind him.

## CHAPTER XV

### Spring Flowers

**J**ILL woke feeling consciously well and happy. Outside the morning was gay. Sunshine, pouring through the unblinded windows, had warmed her while she slept. It glinted upon the cut-glass bottles on her dressing-table and, catching the bevelled edge of the mirror, made of it a bar of steady prismatic light, fresh as beauty strayed from some other world. On the ceiling danced the reflection of the Danube. The door on to the balcony was open, and through it came the sounds of the town and the scent of acacia blossom from the Embankment below.

The radiant Spring morning had thrown its spell over Jill before she woke. The events of the night before seemed like a distant, half-forgotten dream. Her anger and wounded pride had cured themselves. She was hungry and rang for breakfast, but was out of bed and half dressed before it arrived.

Outside in the little garden before the hotel the birds were singing. She wanted to be out there, in the open, to get out of the city, away from the scenes of the last five weeks. As she stood by the open window she stretched herself luxuriously, the clean breeze playing about her bare arms and shoulders. Below her the steamers plied down the gay Duna, and across it Buda slumbered on its hill in the great peace that comes to ancient fortresses. Far beyond, the beech-wooded slopes of the Janos Hegy stretched hazy and inviting, a half-way house to the clouds.

For the first time for weeks she took out a tweed skirt and thick stockings. She would spend the whole day on

## Spring Flowers

the mountain. The skirt was one she had had for years and which she had worn at home. It brought back to her the memory of Sussex and the time before the family had broken up. Yes, the skirt was a link with simpler times. In her Viennese gowns Jill had become cosmopolitan and a woman, but in her country clothes she was a girl again and essentially English. Her hair, which since she had been in Pest she had allowed to grow long, seemed fairer than ever in the bright sunlight.

While she was filling her cigarette case, there was a tap at the door and the little peasant girl, who cleaned the bathroom, appeared. She had brought from the hall a letter from Prince Palugay. Jill read it while the girl stood by, gazing with admiring eyes at the contents of the open drawers and wardrobe.

He was going into the country for three or four days, Miklos said, and he would be back in time for dinner on Friday. It was just like any other note he had ever sent her, in an envelope, but written on the back of a visiting card, without beginning or ending. It was just as if nothing had happened! So that was how he felt about it!

Jill tossed the card on to the dressing-table. She did not care now. When she had awoken, everything had already been settled in her mind, as if during the night her mental processes had reached their conclusion. She had woken refreshed, and with her emotional stress over and done with. The thing was irrevocably ended. He had believed that horrible thing about her. No apologies could alter that. It was finished. And now, because it was finished, she was no longer angry with him. But it was lucky he was going away: that would give her time to write and tell him of her decision before he could come and see her. She could avoid the necessity of an interview and the possibility of a scene. It would be best to write at once. She did not want these thoughts hanging over her and spoiling her enjoyment.

She sat down at the writing-table but, before taking up



## Sweet Pepper

her pen, opened a drawer and produced a half-empty box of chocolates.

"Eat some of those while you wait," she said to the little peasant girl in a mixture of the little Hungarian she had learnt and of German.

The girl flushed with pleasure. Slim, bare-footed, with her coarse linen dress and faded green handkerchief round her head, she was like a little goose-girl in a fairy story. There is a physical delicacy about the Hungarian peasant that makes fairy tales history, and history fairy tales.

"Sing me that song," Jill said, and began a bar or two of one of the tunes she had heard the girl singing while she worked.

Obediently and without self-consciousness the little peasant, her eyes on the chocolates, prepared to sing.

"No, eat first," Jill nodded to her and started her letter. Presently the song began, thin and forlorn, but with a chorus of strange recurring emphasis, to Jill unintelligibly but curiously stirring. Now it expressed exactly her own mood, expressed and intensified, and in a way helped her to write what was in her mind.

The letter she wrote was calm and direct. Words and phrases came easily, for she was very certain of what she wanted to say. She tried not to appear unkind, but she was determined that there should be no mistaking the finality of her intention. She would never speak to him again. She did not try to explain her motives or their causes: that would confuse her purpose. There had been a misunderstanding, that was all. There would have been just the same trouble had she been married to him, and if it had been in England. In many ways he was more English than many of her own countrymen she had known. It would have happened just the same there, not so suddenly yet inevitably. They could never have understood each other. It was lucky theirs was not a permanent partnership. There was no more good in apportioning blame than in dividing a spent fortune. At the end she softened a little, "you have been very kind to me and I have been quite happy. I hope you were

## Spring Flowers

happy with me." Do not try to see me, but do try to think well of me, and again, thank you."

For a moment the choice of an ending puzzled her. Yours ever? Affectionately? Loving? Finally she closed the letter with "Good luck and farewell, Jill." She addressed the note and gave it to the little maid.

"Take these too," she said and thrusting the box of chocolates into her hands, turned to the door. As she did so she felt wondering eyes following her. Well, some one still thinks I'm splendid, she thought, as she went downstairs.

\* \* \* \* \*

On a spur of the Janos heights Jill looked lazily down upon distant Buda. All round, the solitude was a garden of wild flowers: the pervading sweetness wafted from the acacia woods in bloom scented the air. Below her the hillside plunged suddenly to gorges full of stately beeches whose young leaves had almost hidden the old carpet of copper. The Plains were free again! Everywhere the land had woken to the sudden loveliness of Central European Spring. Northwards in the Carpathians and in the high Tartara, snows were melting and the Danube was full again, speeding eagerly eastward and southward on its thousand-mile journey to the sea. It was the Spring of Hungary, sudden and riotous, like the gaiety into which the saddest Hungarian tunes may burst.

Jill was tired after her long walk up the mountain. To lie in the warm sunshine was purest luxury. She did not care to smoke but lay still. Except the sunshine and the Spring nothing seemed of any real importance. She was happy, almost poignantly so. But often when her moods were like this one, especially out of doors and at such times, there was in her happiness a germ of restlessness, that in some natures withers to melancholy resignation, but in herself created a need of adventure, love, anything chancy.

Here alone on the hills the change made by the past weeks had fallen from her. She was English again and younger than she had been since she first came abroad.

## Sweet Pepper

She was back in the open air, where she belonged. She was certain of that as one can be of something only just remembered. The reaction against restaurant life was strong in her and for the first time for many days she was hungry.

Out there on the hillside the past weeks seemed already as distant and indistinct as the city itself. She was glad to be clear of it, yet watching it from afar she could realize its beauty. One can stand outside Budapest to admire it as one could outside a cathedral : it is not like London, Berlin or Paris, which are really provinces. She had grown fond of it : a place to return to when night came and loneliness stole up from the plains to the very outskirts of the city : but by day she liked it best as it was now, distant and misty. The immense river wound from infinite distance to infinite distance. Gathered about it in the centre of the picture were the spires and domes, the curving embankments, the cob-web bridges, the gaunt citadel on the Gallert heights and old Buda with its palace brooding over the younger city.

In the warm sunlight the past had melted away. The Prince's accusation and her own anger were like incidents in antiquity. For a long while she lay gazing up through half-closed lashes at the giddy heights of the sky. Unguessably high above, huge clouds drifted. Was she as rudderless as they, as incapable of choice ? Never mind ! The Spring was all that mattered. After all she did not feel any different from the time when she had lain on the Downs at home, years ago. Had she changed so much ? Had she lost already a little of the impetus with which the fortunate of us are hurled into the world ? A few days ago she had realized bitterly that she was no longer a lady ; that the present was what counted. Had that been true ? She was free again now : she had broken definitely with Prince Palugay, perhaps with the life she had been leading. By the same argument that she had been a cocotte, she was one no longer. No. Was she ? No, but then . . . she lost herself in a maze of plausibilities and presently she slept.

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In the afternoon she smoked and considered her position and her plans for the future. At home in England was the farm : six hundred pounds was the share that she must produce towards it. Jill had saved nearly four hundred pounds from what she had received and had besides a small deposit in a Budapest bank, on which she could live for several weeks.

What was she to do now ? If she could collect another two hundred pounds before December the future would be established. How was it to be done ? Count Arkozi was far away, perhaps in Poland, and fighting, perhaps in the Western Counties, given by the Peace Treaty to Austria : for all she knew he might be dead. To patch up her quarrel with the Prince was not to be thought of : she would never do that. If she did she would forfeit every atom of self-respect. It is curious in what self-respect lies.

To have been accused of infidelity had outraged her feelings. It may have been that, never having herself felt passion she judged it too coldly. Her experiences had meant nothing to her. Certainly she did not feel changed from what she had been in the Vienna days and she still looked at life in the way she had then. Perhaps in virginity it is always the emotional rather than the physical innocence that is important. To her, what she had been accused of was something not only hateful but also irrational. "Baby" Bethlen indeed ! Nice enough boy, but to think of . . . No, she had been absolutely fixed in her determination when she had written that letter to the Prince. She had told him that she would never speak to him again. As it turned out she never did.

That was over, it had passed out of her life. Strange how little she cared ! It was not that she was heartless nor that he had been a bad fellow, but to her he had never stood for anything. Mentally they had never been more than acquaintances. She had not felt that she knew him better than she had known the "Microbe" or poor old Csaradah, or any other of the "Musketeers." He had given her a good time and she hoped that she had been

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nice to him in return. She had never been intimate with him as she had been with Tibor Arkozi, and even he and she had not been more than good friends. She doubted if he would have wanted her to feel deeply for him.

Perhaps she would never care for any one: perhaps she would never love . . . and yet. The beech woods beside her were full of dappled sunlight and little secrets: the scent of acacia was everywhere: the Spring was stirring. Oh, yes some day she would be able to love!

Presently she rose to her feet and took a path that led through the woods to the summit of the mountain. It wended through clearings full of bluebells and of flowers she had never before seen. The soft turf and fallen leaves were like clouds under her feet. There was no effort in walking: she could go on like this for ever.

One late frosty afternoon she and Glory had walked through these woods. She remembered now how forbidding she had thought them: she would have been frightened to have stayed alone in them. That had been only four months ago! How long it seemed! She had been "good" then, but it was the woods that had changed, not herself. Odd! Now she was only conscious in them of a sensation of being expected, of something invisible but close at hand that was waiting for her, that stopped still when she did, listening. Fancy! She gathered a handful of dry leaves and let them trickle through her fingers as she walked.

How lovely it was to be in the country again. Nothing mattered very much out here. She had money enough for a time. The other two hundred would have to come from somewhere. Perhaps some one else would want to take her under his protection; she was known now. Perhaps some one would write suggesting some arrangement. But not yet! She wanted a rest, wanted to be free of the restaurants and the late hours. She did not care if nothing happened. Perhaps she would stay on in Hungary till the labour crisis was over at home: it must be some day, and then she could find work. And in Hungary she could live for a year or two on what she had

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saved. Perhaps she would go home at once. She was tired of worrying. What did it matter!

Now that the anxiety was no longer urgent she could consider life with more assurance. For the first time since she had left Vienna, she was not afraid to look forward. Through the trees, she caught sight of the little hillside restaurant that half unconsciously she had been seeking. How hungry she was! Life was not so bad, after all.

## CHAPTER XIV

### The Crusaders

**D**AYS passed, but Jill heard nothing of Prince Palugay. She had begun to fancy that he must still be in the country, when at the end of a week she met him face to face in the Vaczi Utca. For a second she almost lost her presence of mind because she thought he was going to speak to her, but he smiled, took off his hat and passed on. That evening a beautiful bouquet of flowers came for her without card or message. She concluded that this was to show that he did not bear her any ill-will. He had a graceful way of doing everything, she thought, and was genuinely glad that he had not been hurt by what she had written.

The Musketeers she saw once or twice : they bowed to her very politely. Once the Microbe made as if he would come and speak, but she saw Pussy say something that stopped him. She wondered what version of the quarrel they had heard. Miklos was not likely to say that he had been jealous of one of their number. It did not really matter. But they had been nice to her and she did not want them to think ill of her.

Actually at this time she saw very few people who had been connected with her life during the past weeks, for the weather remained radiant and she spent her days on the Janos Hegy and on the heights of the Schwarenberg. Twice or three times she played golf. One afternoon, as she went round the golf course, two Englishmen, a sailor on the Danube Control and a young Highlander, passed and repassed her. They looked curiously. Did they know, she wondered ? By the way they watched her she fancied they might : still she could not be sure. In any

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case they must have known her by sight, for they were often in the Ritz. In the evenings she dined in the smaller restaurants, partly for economy and partly because she would have been stared at if she had sat alone in more fashionable places.

One night only did she dine with any one. She had taken her seat in the corner of a small restaurant where Tibor had often taken her, and had just ordered her meal when two Hungarian officers, friends of his, entered. With deliberation she was quietly dressed and they did not notice her until they were passing her table. When they did they stopped and bowed. They were both young, one perhaps twenty-five, the other a year or two older. They were not quite of the same social class as Tibor, but they had served with him during the war and they were mixed up with the same adventurous life as his own, coming and going on secret journeys, often with their safety in their hands.

The younger, Szentmiklosi, fair-haired with dark Hungarian eyebrows and lashes, had a pugnacious expression. He was a small land-owner : having let his property to farmers he spent his time between a rather dissolute life in Budapest and hair-breadth adventures. His companion was of immensely powerful build, dark, silent and awkward of speech : he wore his moustache and hair, which was not often tidy, very long. Jill had christened him "The Backwoodsman." His father, who had been a History Professor in some University in Transylvania, which had since the war been given to the Roumanians, had consequently lost his post : both he and his son were badly off.

It was more than likely that neither of these young men knew what Jill's relationship with Tibor had been. Probably they had thought of her as his friend : after all the English were mad : no one could be expected to be able to know what an English girl might or might not do. Jill herself, however, knew a good deal about their doings and they might safely regard her as almost one of themselves.



## Sweet Pepper

For a moment they stood bowing and serious : then Szentmiklosi asked if she would allow them to sit at her table. Jill at once assented, and he and the Backwoodsman sat down. She had not spoken to any one for a week and was glad of companionship, even if the conversation had to be carried on by her in her indifferent German, for her Hungarian was still too slight to be useful.

She asked their news. Nothing important. It was curious, she thought, how people who lived most exciting lives seemed to have the least to tell you.

The Backwoodsman had just returned from Poland. Things looked bad there, very bad, he said. The Bolsheviki were moving southwards every day : it would be touch and go whether they overran the whole country or not. If they did. . . .

Had he seen Count Arkozi there or had he heard any news of him, she asked. There followed an awkward silence. Both men became absorbed in contemplation of their plates. No, he was not there any more, the Backwoodsman told her. Jill was sure from the way he had spoken that he knew more than he cared to tell. Was he safe? she inquired. Oh, yes, he was safe, they both replied. One of their mysteries ! Tibor must be planning or doing something very important, she supposed. He would never be happy otherwise. Good luck to him ! Mysteries, always mysteries, but it was only young fanatics like these who held Bolshevism and utter ruin at bay, a hard, thankless, misrepresented task. Good luck to them all !

She had been tired of her life with Prince Palugay and she was glad to be in this atmosphere again. In Paris the Supreme Council were sitting, considering, making utterances, issuing protocols, referring matters to sub-committees, adjourning conferences of Canutes, planning the limitation of the tide. In Vienna she had been in touch with this world of complacent make-believe. Futility, futility. Outside, alone and insignificant were the effective people ; men of every calibre, patriots, poseurs, poltroons, Zonays and d'Annunzios and their like. These

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were the people who did things : their personal adventures were history.

Both these young men were living a racketty life when they were in Pest, spending much more than they could afford : but these were only their holidays, when they let themselves go like young soldiers did in their ten days' leave.

Jill was tired of clever people ; it was good to be with those who just did things. The food and the wine seemed delicious to-night. She had intended taking only *fogas* or *sterlet* and a Turkish coffee, but she ended in eating quite a long dinner. The Rizling was delicious : it glittered like pale gold in her glass. What good fellows they were !

At first Szentmiklosi did most of the talking, but when he had drunk enough wine to overcome his shyness, the Backwoodsman began to talk too. He had just the voice that one would have expected, gruff and slow. He was telling her of an escapade of his companion's, who kept interrupting and saying that it was "not interesting" and "not important."

The Backwoodsman told the story of his friend's adventures with many laughs and grunts. Jill asked Szentmiklosi to tell her about his "battle," but he was not to be drawn. It had not been very difficult, that was all he would say, but he chuckled into his glass as he drank.

Presently he called the leader of the *tziganes* and hummed to him a tune he wanted. The Gipsy took his stand before them and began to play. Time passed, an hour : they drank more wine and smoked and drank again. Jill was surprised to find how at home she felt with these two men, whom really she had only seen once or twice at Tibor's apartment.

They sat, their elbows on the table, their chins on their hands and with their eyes on the gipsy. To-night the tunes were quick and gay. Curious how Hungarian she had become : English when she was alone on the hills, but here with the gipsy music, the lamps glittering on the glasses of wine, Hungarian. To-night England seemed

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scarcely credible: could it really be like that, asphalt roads, neat suburbs, and a policeman at every crossing, to-night laughable as the bye-laws of a town-council picked up on a battle-field. And to-night she was drinking Rizling and the real things of life were very close, the old elemental permanent things, faiths, comradeship, daring and sacrifice. She could feel the spirit of the Great Plain all about her, the wide horizons, the slow sad ploughs, the peasant girls left watching by the river . . . and Horthy's Hussars with eagles' feathers jauntily in their caps, their bits jangling as they wheeled and gathered, waiting for the new crusade.

The Backwoodsman was holding the gipsy's eye, urging him with the slightest swing of his shoulders. The music passed from tune to tune. "That was the tune of his regiment," Szentmiklosi told her. Jill knew it well and hummed it to herself. They drank each other's health, Tibor's health, and when their glasses were empty they were quickly filled again.

She had drunk quite enough, Jill thought. Oh, yet she had drunk water for a week! It was nice to enjoy oneself sometimes. Szentmiklosi was proposing a toast.

"Our King . . . your King . . . any King . . . all Kings, eh?" he said to Jill.

She nodded and drank.

"Bolsheviki ergh!" He jerked down his thumb.

Jill raised her glass and they drank again.

"Our Kings, any King, all the Kings," she said and drank.

"Bolsheviki, ergh?" He questioned "ergh."

He wanted her to repeat the imprecation. It was like a child's game, but he had reached the quarrelsome stage and he looked pugnacious enough at any time. Men were like children, she thought.

"Bolsheviki ergh," she said, smiling and trying to copy his ejaculation.

He was immensely pleased with her effort.

"Good, very good. Bolsheviki ergh! Bolsheviki ergh! Bolsheviki ergh!"

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The words were like a new toy to him : he looked down smiling at the floor as if to find the wicked and overthrown Bolsheviks there.

It must have been like this when knights drank before they went out to slay dragons, Jill thought and laughed. Dragons ! Dragons ! Why not ? They did not seem so impossible to-night : not nearly as impossible as the Supreme Council which . . . which . . . she laughed again.

The restaurant was beginning to empty : at the far end the lights were being put out. It must be past midnight already. The waiters were stripping the tables and piling them one above the other. The Backwoodsman was paying the bill for all of them. Jill protested : they must let her pay her share, she said : after all " joining up " and paying one's share was an established Hungarian custom. She knew, besides, that neither of the men could well afford to treat her. But the Backwoodsman was obdurate ; he and his friend were both going away from Pest the next morning, that was why they had come to have a good dinner to-night : one must enjoy oneself while one could.

Jill had risen and her cloak had been wrapped round her.

" Where are you both going ? " she asked. " Outside Hungary ? "

The Backwoodsman had drained the last bottle into their glasses. Was it the fifth or sixth ? The bottles stood now in a row, mutes at the gay funeral of sobriety. Dreadful ! Never mind !

" Over the frontiers. Yes," Szentmiklosi said, " but not outside Hungary. There is only one Hungary, the Hungary of yesterday and to-morrow."

The Backwoodsman had buttoned up his long chocolate great coat. How huge he was ! What a great lump of a man ! She liked them both ; fine fellows ! They were not quite like Tibor and Miklos in some things, especially over their wine, but still fine, manly fellows, the sort of men who would see one through a tight place.

Standing there, she was conscious of what to her was a rare sensation. In that instance she realized the dramatic

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*quality of the scene, the last gipsies stealing past, the large dim restaurant, the white cloth on the table, their three dark figures standing with raised glasses, to drink a farewell toast, and about all the sense of imminent departure.*

She was drinking to their safe return, and while she did so, she saw that their glasses were still full. They were going to drink her health, when she had finished. No, no, she did not want that. She did not want the importance of an occasion spoilt by the gratification of a moment. It was they who were going and she who was staying: they, who were going out beyond the frontiers into the risky void.

Lowering her half empty glass, she raised it again quickly.

"Nëmm, Nëmm, Shăwhăh," she said.

"Nëmm, Nëmm, Shăwhăh," came the answer, deep and earnest: a pause when her nerves tingled and then the ring of the empty glasses on the table.

Shăwhăh!

Jill undressed that night by the open window. Life was good, after all. The world was still a fine place. There were fine people in it. Szentmiklosi and the Backwoodsman were starting off in a few hours and she had helped to make their last happy. She had felt the magic of comradeship. What brave fellows! And they liked her! She was going to be brave too. It seemed easy to be brave to-night. The wine ran in her veins. There were little lone clouds in the moonlit sky and silver ripples on the Duna. Who could not be brave to-night? Snatches of a gay *czardas* racked her memory.

No, she wasn't going to make a failure of life: not she! . . . Nëmm, Nëmm, Shăwhăh! . . . Nëmm, Nëmm, Shăwhăh. She could not tell what she would do: it wasn't any good making plans. Something would happen soon: and something did.

## BOOK III



## CHAPTER I

### English Again

THE week before Jill would not have noticed the Englishman standing at the reception counter : a week before she had still been suffering from reaction from the sort of life she had been leading with the Musketeers. All she had wanted then was to get away from the city, from the streets, from every one and to be alone ; for amongst the Musketeers she had spent nearly all her waking hours in public. But as it was she was beginning, if unconsciously, to grow tired of her own society and her interest in other people was reviving. For more than a fortnight she had regarded those about her as a nuisance, or at best as part of the unconsidered framework of life, like floors and ceilings.

She saw him the moment the door of the lift was opened, obviously a fresh arrival, talking to the reception clerk in the outer hall. Now the Ritz at Budapest is small, and so many rooms had been requisitioned for Missions and diplomatic hangers on, that there was scarcely half a dozen left for travellers ; thus a new arrival was by no means an everyday occurrence.

Still, had she not been in that particular frame of mind, she might not have noticed him at all. He was some distance from her and with the light from the hall windows behind him, but she knew at once that she had not seen him before. Even then, if he had not been wearing an English uniform, she would not have been interested, but except for the four or five members of the British Military Mission, she had not seen an English soldier since she had left Vienna.

The man at the counter was tall and lean with shoulders



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so square and a back so flat, that even the British Warm he was wearing hung becomingly on him. She noticed that it was not of the usual sack with sleeves variety but was well cut, that his scarlet-banded staff cap was a soldier's and not a rat-catcher's, that his sturdy shoes had a patina of old walnut. She noticed these details at sight, for at the War Office she had become somewhat of a severe critic of military turn-out. A very pleasant type of Englishman, she thought, just the kind that one wanted foreigners to see. His back was turned to her so that she could not see his face.

Just as she was passing the bookstall, the girl in it called to her.

"Mees, the English papers is arrived : *The Times*, *The Bull*, *The Herald*, *The New York*. They is all come to-day."

Jill stopped and, leaning her bag of golf clubs against the stall, looked through the heap of papers.

The new arrival was involved in what had evidently been a long argument with the reception clerk : Jill heard a little of it. He was speaking with that deliberately weary patience with which some Englishmen face the difficulties of Continental travel. Jill knew the tone.

"You admit that an officer of the British Mission came here yesterday. Good ! You have admitted that ?"

"Perfectly, sir." The hotel clerk had already retired behind a cosmopolitan blandness, which hotel officials assume as soon as the last bedroom that they wish to let is booked.

"And you promised him to keep a room for an officer who was arriving to-day. Good."

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, as I've explained to you, I'm the officer. And now when I ask for my room you tell me you have given it by mistake to a gentleman with a name like an organ-grinder."

"We are very sorry, sir. A mistake has been made. But it is impossible to find you another room in this hotel. I doubt if you will find one anywhere."

## English Again

"So you've told me. But I don't happen to want another room. The one you promised to keep for me will do quite well." There was not a tinge of annoyance or excitement in his voice, Jill noticed. "How you get the nobleman and his monkey who you've let the room to out of it, is, of course, your own affair."

The Englishman's tone was colder and wearier than ever: he might have been explaining to a mentally deficient child some matter in which he personally took no interest. The hotel clerk, on the other hand, was beginning to show symptoms of personal feelings, conceivably he might soon reveal a long, repressed nationality.

The soldier must have heard the bookstall girl speaking to some one in his own language, but not wishing to appear curious, he did not look round at once. Now while the clerk examined his finger nails with the evident intent of not being drawn further, he turned his head to see who was behind him. As he did so, Jill looked up from the pages of *Vogue* and for a moment their glances met. His, as he turned, was distant with that aloofness which is often defensive, but now as he saw her it quickened momentarily to interest and was then quickly averted.

Jill, choosing a paper, picking up her golf clubs, went out of the hotel.

Rather an interesting face, she thought, as she crossed the river. He must have been in the middle thirties. His hair and close-clipped moustache were dark. A strong, interesting face, but hardly a happy one. His nose and chin were clear cut, his cheeks and eyes rather haggard, and his lips, strangely controlled, suggested reserve, perhaps haughtiness. She continued to wonder about him and what he was doing in Budapest until she boarded the tram and was able to open her English newspaper.

Jill stayed on the golf links till late afternoon and did not get back to the Ritz till dusk. As she approached it she found a surprise.

Outside the hotel was a Vauxhall car that reminded her very much of the Mission car in which she had so often been

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driven in Vienna. As she passed through the revolving door, she heard her old chief's unmistakeable voice. There he was sure enough, just inside the hall, talking to a man in a grey flannel suit whom she recognized as the officer she had seen by the bookstall that morning.

When he saw her General Hawkins frowned, screwed his eye-glass into his eye and frowned again, before he had made sure it was she.

"Why upon my soul, my dear young lady! My . . . bless us. What on earth are you er . . . doing er here. Thought you must be back in England, ages back. Been meanin' to write to yer and puttin' it off. But there you know what I'm like when it comes to writin' letters. Bless us. Well, well!"

Jill was thankful that he had not waited for her to answer the question as to what she was doing in Budapest. She had had time to collect herself before she had an opportunity to speak.

"But yer don't know young Wythes, do yer? This is Miss Mordaunt, Harry, who used ter run me and my office at the War House and up in Vienna. There hasn't really been any Mission left in poor old Wien, since she er chucked us."

Jill and the young man shook hands. His hand was very bony, she thought, and as he greeted her he looked very straight into her eyes.

"Why last time I saw her," General Hawkins rambled on, "she was comin' down here for a week, she told me. A week. What on earth . . . why let's go and sit down inside for a bit. The car can jolly well wait. Merlis has had all to-day off. Do him good to cool his heels."

He led the way towards the lounge and pushed open the glass door for Jill, who passed through and chose a seat on a sofa. The two men sat down opposite her and General Hawkins, leaning his elbows on the table, looked her up and down admiringly.

"And most dashin' too, eh? Well this is nice. Still here! Bless us. You are an independent young woman. Been stayin' here all on your lonesome?" A waiter was

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hovering near with inquiring eyebrows. Jill, to gain time, nodded him to her side.

"General, this is my hotel, you must have something to drink. The cocktails here aren't as good as the Bristol, but you must try one and you too, er Major Wythes, is it?"

"Thanks very much, I will . . . Captain as a matter of fact."

"Yes . . . three Martinis, please," she nodded to the waiter.

"You were asking me about my being here still, General. It's funny, isn't it? Coming down here on the boat I met an American woman who was, oh, awfully, awfully kind to me and so I stayed on with her. She asked me to, of course . . . she . . . went away . . . two or three days ago. And what are you doing here, General?"

He and Captain Wythes, "who'd been doin' a bit of work and was goin' to take a few days off for a change now," had been down to Pecs by car and had arrived in Budapest that morning. He had just been about to start back for Vienna, when she had appeared. Captain Wythes was going to spend a few days in Budapest. Bless her no, not work, just to look round and that kind of business. What was she doing that night? Dining alone? Yes? Sper-lendid! Good work! She must take "young Wythes here" under her wing . . . he meant . . . er . . . not er . . . No er, bless her, no. He could not stay to dinner himself, but many thanks. He must be off in half a shake. He'd been tryin' to look up the old Admiral, but he was out. Had he enjoyed himself at Pecs? Well . . . er . . . no. But he hadn't been over for that, been down to have a squint at the old Serb, difficult . . . oh, very . . . most difficult. . . . Oh, no, not impossible . . . not at all, but er . . . yes. Did she know that there was a new French General in Vienna? Quite a decent sort, but not a patch on "*Mon Général*." Upon his soul "*Mon Général*" had been a comic beggar. They'd sent him down to Pest, but now they'd cleared him off again to Prague to teach the Tschekhs to be soldiers. He didn't envy him, and so on.

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Jill was delighted to see him again. There was so much she wished to ask him, that she did not know where to begin. Had he been home?

Lor' no, hadn't had a chance yet. The office had never been straight since she'd left. There was no one now who could do shorthand: a couple of subalterns smashed on the infernal typewriter, but they never seemed to be there when they were wanted, and they smoked Virginia cigarettes in the office. One could not tell them not to, cause they'd probably . . . and that sort of thing. But he'd thought er seriously of cuttin' out smokin' altogether in the office, which meant knockin' it off himself . . . bad as that! 'Twas really! No, things weren't like they used to be in her time. Did she know the old Admiral in Budapest? No? She ought to. Splendid feller! Dear old chap! He must really be goin'. No, he must really. Did she like Hungary? Yes? Sper-lendid! Pity they hadn't been on our side . . . but then none of the . . . well one mustn't say that! And Allies were always a bit difficult to get on with, he expected. But there, he must really be goin'. Think what Merlis would be sayin'. What was her mother doin'? Growing tomatoes? Bless him! Tomatoes! Had she seen old Goslin'? No? Really must be goin'. Nearly seven. Lor! bless him.

He rose and adjusted his muffler. The pocket of his British Warm wanted sewing up, she noticed. She had often mended it in Vienna, though she didn't suppose he had ever known. They drifted into the hall again.

"Yes, young Wythes has got his room all right," he said in answer to her question, "but what do er yer know about it?"

He looked at her, pursing his mouth. So she was the "young peach" that Wythes had seen in the morning. Was she? And that's who he'd been bothered about all day, was it? Wella, wella! So unlike young Wythes too! They were to take care of themselves and Jill was not to lead young Wythes into temptation. Young Wythes was not an old buffer like himself who didn't matter. Oh, he'd got something in his pocket that would

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amuse her. He produced an unbelievably mixed cargo and from it an envelope.

"There's the snapshot of us all, when we went to that . . . er . . . bathin' place. I promised it yer, don't say I forget things. Good-bye. Won't yer come and look us up at the Mission when yer goin' through Wien on yer way home? Might just as well, yer know. Good-bye and er . . . wella . . . good-bye."

He shook Jill's hand and then plunged his own deep into the pockets of his coat, and involved himself in the turnstile door. Jill and Captain Wythes stood as he had left them, one on each side of the doorway. They watched him crane his neck, look this way and that for the car, nod to himself as he recognized it, and disappear out of sight. Then they looked towards each other and smiled.

Jill was sorry to see her old chief go. What a funny, kindly, jolly old thing he was to be sure; a fine type and one that would soon be extinct. He was always so sure that every one was finer and nicer than they fancied themselves to be and he had left something of his good-will behind him.

## CHAPTER II

### The Traditionalist

**A**S Jill dressed for dinner, she was as excited as she had been for her first parties after leaving school. She had not spoken to an Englishman for months, and not to such a presentable one since she had left England. In Vienna, except for General Hawkins, there had only been synthetic officers, as she had heard some one in the War Office call them, a succession of rather uninteresting young men.

At first she determined to wear her new grey and ostrich feather dress, but after she had put it, and the stockings and shoes that went with it, on her bed, she decided that it was too much of her Prince Palugay period ; that a young English girl would not wear such a frock for a quiet dinner, even if she had one like it. No, it would not be in Captain Wythes' taste : he would think it too smart. He looked to be the sort of man who liked women in black and girls in white. She took from her wardrobe a plain black lace dress that Count Arkozi had given her. That would be simple enough ! She placed it on the bed too. How startling the grey and silver feathers looked beside it ! The thought of how much of her it would have left disclosed made her uncomfortable, yet a fortnight ago she had thought nothing of it. Her eye must have been getting sadly " out " for English standards, she realized.

As she stood arranging her hat before the long mirror, she decided that, after all, simple clothes became her best. She had never achieved the proper air for carrying off remarkable dresses. Her ankles looked best in black stockings, too. She remembered how old Csaradah had

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said that, though a man looked first at coloured stockings, he looked longest at the black ones.

On her way downstairs to the lift she met her friend, the little peasant girl, who cleaned the bathroom. The girl had a yellow handkerchief round her head to-night. As she stood against the wall to let Jill pass, she smiled and Jill smiled back. For the first time for weeks she was actually as happy as the little servant.

In the hall Captain Wythes was waiting for her. He rose from the sofa with that absence of hurry which is no longer conscious, even if it ever had been. The movement was certainly not effusive, but it conveyed just the amount of difference that was pleasant to a woman. In a dinner jacket he looked smarter and leaner than ever : his clothes seemed spread rather than filled ; he was all angles and flat surfaces, like those chip-wood dolls of modern portraiture. Starched linen, too, looked odd and pleasant, after the pleated shirts or day clothes which were more usual in Pest.

How English he was ! Prince Palugay, whose clothes were made in London and who might well have been an Englishman, had never succeeded in acquiring quite this appearance : his tie never seemed quite right.

He was telling her as they moved towards the restaurant, that he had engaged a corner table.

What was the difference between him and the young attachés of the Italian Princess or the French officers who filled the big window ? It was difficult to analyse ; the mere contrasts perhaps, the gloss on his linen, of his shoes, of his hair, against the dull black of the cloth. Foreign black clothes were usually shiny.

Fred, the *maître d'hôtel*, bowed them to their table. The Spanish diplomats, the Polish minister's wife, the German spy Baroness, the plump and beaming " American Christians," as they were called in Budapest, the Necker Baby were all admiring them, as they walked to their table. How happy she was ! The Italian attachés were whispering to each other : about her companion's clothes,



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she felt sure : clothes were a matter that interested them much.

Captain Wythes was telling her that she must order dinner, because she would know the local specialities. They consulted together the *carte*, written in Hungarian and French : various dishes were proposed, considered and rejected. It was like a committee meeting ! How English ! Would he care to try a *goulas* ? That was local enough. What was it like ? A sort of Irish stew with paprika. What was paprika ? Didn't he know paprika ? How did one say it in English ? Sweet pepper—that was it. Everything in Hungary was paprika. One ate it in a hundred ways. It was what garlic was to the Italians. The stalls in the open-air markets were piled with scarlet pyramids of it, the sauces were vermilion with it. One ate it fresh in salads. The cottages were hung with festoons of the dazzling flame-like fruit of it. Once tasted, its subtle fire could never be forgotten. To her—sweet pepper—with its caustic, honied tang, was bound up for ever with Hungary and adventure.

Well, he didn't know that he much cared about messed-up things. Stage English ! Jill chose a Hungarian fish course and, in the end, they agreed on *rost braten*, which was really steak and onions. Good old steak and onions. Did she really like them, too ? Jill nodded and smiled. What an absurd tie between them !

"I've been wanting to have a go at this Tokay of theirs for ever so long," he said. "I suppose you're blasé and all that about it, but I've never run up against it somehow. Once in a Polish castle I had a chance, and of course I could have got it in Vienna, but somehow I never did. Shall we try some ?"

Jill looked over the wine list with him. Leanyka or Rizling was best. No. 116 was supposed to be very good. But he must not drink Tokay till the end of dinner, except with soup, if he wanted to. She was pleased to think she could teach him something about what is always considered a man's business, and she told him of the night in

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Vienna when General Hawkins had found her drinking Tokay, and how embarrassed she had felt when he had chaffed her about it. Ages ago, all that seemed, she thought to herself. What a lot she had learnt since then ; perhaps correspondingly she had forgotten something ; perhaps when one learns something new, one always forgets something else . . . making room. But did one ever really forget, or was everything stored away in dusty corners ?

"Lucky you gave me the tip," he was saying. "One hates not doing the right thing, in public especially before. . . ." He looked eloquently towards tables where officers of certain Allied nations were dining. His expression had not altered and he had only moved his head slightly, but the gesture was encyclopædic in what it conveyed.

When she had told him not to order Tokay till after dinner, she had done so rather sex-consciously, to score a point against a man, but he had taken the correction with a nod of thanks that had been disarming. Her opinion towards men, which had been changing during the past fortnight, was disconcerted and readjusted itself. Men were still, as a sex, hateful, but there were exceptions. He, now, was different, yet he was very manly : that was what made him nice. Were the hateful ones not very male . . . was it that only a few men were really very . . .

She'd known old 'Enery 'Awkins a long time, had she ? Jill began to talk about him and explaining how she had worked under him at the War Office and in Vienna, indeed ever since her father had been killed. Captain Wythes narrowed his eyes and nodded ever so slightly. Sympathy : that was the kind Englishmen gave, and to her it was the most comforting : but no wonder other nations find us rather grim at times.

Was she related to the General Mordaunt, the Johnny in Military History ? This after a pause left to avoid the change of subject seeming indelicate. With the English subtlety is between sentences, not in them. Yes,

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he was her great-grandfather. A suggestion of a chuckle, then after he had helped them both to more wine, great-grandfather ! Was he now ? He explained how General Mordaunt and his campaigns had been the bugbear of his own life at Sandhurst. He was worse than Königgratz and Topography and only a little better than Administration and the Campaign in the Wilderness. Another pause, to recover from having got so near to talking shop ; privilege of the senior service. How did she like living in Vienna ? And London ? What had she done there during the war time ?

Had she noticed the change during the war or had it been too gradual, but of course she would not have been out of the nursery before '14, he said, with just that benign flattery which General Hawkins always used when dealing with a woman's age. That type of man seemed to consider, Jill thought, youth particularly creditable in her own sex and not a little reprehensible in theirs. She watched a party of Hussar officers passing out of the restaurant : they were laughing and joking. It was the night of the month on which their regiment held its dinner. London ! how long ago it seemed.

She settled down to telling him about studio parties in Notting Hill and Royal Hospital Road, which she had thought naughty once, of an occasional afternoon on the river and, above all, of dancing. What a jolly tune *Michigan* had been and *Jingle Johnny* and a host of others. She talked on of these little war-time gaieties because although they had been only short interludes in a life of war work, it was by them that she had judged the passing of events. One day at the " War House " had been like any other. Man cannot live by forms alone. But one did not forget the first time one tasted a Clover Club, or had a fur coat, or went to the Crabtree, or for the matter of that, the night one was driven home for the last time by some young man who was killed the week afterwards. Of such fragments is the patchwork of remembrance made.

He was watching her queerly. Was he thinking of

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what she was saying? His mind was not being merely receptive, she felt that. Wasn't he interested in dancing and having a good time? Did he disapprove of that sort of thing in war time? Some people did. She had lost the thread of what she had been saying. It was his turn to tell her something now: she had been doing all the talking for a long time. One must go fifty-fifty in confidences. Was he fond of dancing? she asked. How thin his hands were: strong, hairy hands.

"I used to dance once. Oh, a lot, once . . . years ago," he said, "but now . . . well there are all these new dances that I don't know."

Was his voice a little scornful? Did he hate things just because they were new? Lots of men did: rather a nice healthy type of them too: funny! She watched him as she sipped her wine. She could not tell what his thoughts were, but they were unpleasant, she fancied from the line of his lips. His was not an inexpressive face and as she watched it she could see the change of feelings, but the indications were slight. He looks as if he had suffered, she thought. Perhaps he had been badly wounded. Was he thinking of that now? In the silence the ghost of a shudder seemed to pass close to their table.

"No, I don't know these modern dances," he said presently, "and one hates feeling out of things, so when people start dancing nowadays, I just clear off and slip up to bed."

He watched viciously his interlaced fingers on the table: the muscles of them were strained and taut. So that was it!

"You see during the war," he went on, "I wasn't in exactly the places where one picks up the latest dance steps." His tone was very cold. Jill felt that this constraint held back some bitterness that was never vented, something which he never talked of but never forgot: an unfortunate subject! For a moment or two they were silent, drawing back from the edge of that something, casting about for a fresh theme.

"I've got so out of things, you see," he went on. "I was

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soldiering abroad in '12, '13 and '14 and until the war I hadn't really been in London since 1911, that's nine years now. Of course I found things awfully changed."

He paused again.

"What were the changes you noticed most?" she asked to draw him out.

"You see, soldiering abroad I'd made most of my pals in my own regiment, or soldiers anyway," he told her. "Nearly all that lot went under quite early. I didn't know any one, at least there were very few left and they'd got in with a new lot, or got married or drifted off. I seem to know scarcely any one in London. One of my clubs had gone bust while I was out there. There was a new hall porter in the other, and he asked me my name and looked me up in a book. You've no idea what a lost soul that made me feel. Silly, the things one minds! All the places I used to go to had changed or gone under, like people I knew. The Empire was a sort of cinema place, and the Oxford had become a sort of theatre. The Tivoli was off the map altogether. I remember such jolly times at the old Tiv. when Chirgwin and Little Tich and that fellow that used to 'abrev' and all that crowd were there. I suppose they're still about, but I didn't strike the places where they are nowadays.

"The second night I was home I went round to the Gaiety: felt low and queer going all on one's own, but I thought it would buck me up. One side of me in the stalls was some North-country *schieber* in most shocking awful clothes and a stud like a motor lamp. He grunted to his wife and cleared his throat such a lot, that I tucked my shoes under my chair, out of harm's way: the other side was some young blighter in tweeds with dazzle pattern socks and Norwegian shoes. In the stalls of the Gaiety, mark you! God's Aunt! I felt like Rip van Winkle. Besides that there was some sort of a military sportsman in service dress, booted and spurred, one supposed he'd left his charger in the cloak-room. There weren't two white ties in the house besides mine."

Jill nodded sympathetically: Uncle Dan had been just like that.

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"Later on I picked up with a sailor cousin of mine," he continued, warming a little to his subject, "and he took me round a bit. Extraordinary how sailors always find the fun. But things had altered and I soon found I was a back number. People were drinking cocktails in the restaurant of the Ritz at lunch, girls and all."

He paused again.

"What did you do next?" Jill asked. "I suppose you didn't stay in London as you didn't like what it had become. It must take a bit of settling down to. Of course I can't remember it properly before the war."

"I went off to the East coast pretty soon. Some of my relations hang out there. They were very decent, and I got a bit of shooting and that. I really was just beginning to feel my feet again and to think it must have been all my fancy 'cause in the country one doesn't notice things so much. Well then, my old uncle and aunt got up a bit of a jollification, just for me: very sporting of them 'cause they ain't exactly a giddy pair, as a rule. They play patience after dinner and read the *Spectator* and all that stodgy stuff till they doze off, most nights. But I suppose they saw I wanted cheering up. They did everything slap up: bubbly wine and crackers. They must have remembered how I liked crackers as a kid. I hadn't seen crackers for ever so long. I thought I'd forgotten all about them. So far so good, but then after dinner they must have dancing in the drawing-room. They'd had the floor done up on the sly, a surprise for me. And it was. At first it looked like being the greatest fun, but somehow it wasn't."

"What bad luck," Jill said. "What went wrong? I should not have thought that in the country they danced anything very new."

"Oh, I don't know. The little bit I was sorted out with was different from the girls I used to know: real good-looker and jolly, but different somehow, cheeky and a bit too bright and that. She thought me a proper old duffer 'cause I didn't do that and know that or hadn't seen t'other, things that were ancient history and now

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and ever shall be, Amen, to her, but that I'd never heard of. I couldn't match her steps or talk her brew of slang, and I didn't know the unspoken part of a toast she started. I swear girls of her age didn't even know about . . . er . . . er . . . such things when . . . before that time. Well, she made me feel eighty."

Jill wondered what he would have thought of some of the girls who had worked in the War Office with her and smiled.

"You don't like them too modern," she said: she had known he would not. Funny how one could tell at once

"Oh, I'm sure she didn't really mean anything: I'm sure she meant to be decent and shake me up. I expect she'd been given the tip by my Aunt. Anyway next day she tootled over in a little car all on her own and got out of it over the door; yards of leg and no skirt to speak of. Great fun for me! I dare say she did it always that way and didn't think it a bit odd, but we used to have to pay to see things like that, when I was twenty. Upon my soul one did! Anyway I felt more of a fogey than ever. I don't mean that I don't enjoy things, or that I thought everything had gone to the deuce; only I'd skipped so many changes that I couldn't get inside the new ideas: they stayed new."

Jill liked his deep, low voice. "Did you come out here then?" she asked. "They really might have given you a home job after you'd been abroad so long, mightn't they?"

"Oh, I wasn't going to go watching on the Rhine and that sort of game, but I fussed about a bit. After a little I got the offer of the job I'm on now. I know two languages pretty well and so I drifted out to Mitel-Europe. Funny how one settles down to it. I expect you have. To tell the truth I feel less out of it here, nowadays, than I do in England. It isn't home of course, but it's better than having it rubbed into one all day that one hasn't really a home to be in."

The cloth was cleared: the Tokay set on the table.

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Jill opened her cigarette case and lit one of those preposterous Turkish cigarettes which only she and the Necker Baby seemed able to afford.\* For weeks she had smoked nothing else and she had ceased to be conscious of their size or of her ruby-ringed holder, which had first made her realize with what nice grace a cigarette could be handled. Captain Wythes was lighting a cigar with the care of a connoisseur handling porcelain, and watching her cigarette with one eyelid slightly lowered. He was thinking it loud, she realized suddenly; he was classing her with the young lady with "yards of leg."

"You don't like it?" she asked.

"Well . . . as a matter of fact . . . it sounds devilish rude . . . but . . . I don't know that I exactly do. But I expect it's the fashion and that. I dare say it's just because I'm not used to it. I expect people think they draw better or smoke longer, or something."

"I didn't choose them," Jill explained. "You see, I was given a box of them . . ." which was true enough. "And I must smoke them up, mustn't I?"

He nodded sympathetically. A thing like that might happen to any one! That was all right! He was quite satisfied, but she must be careful. She hated to shock people, especially men of his type, because being shocked was all distress and no self-satisfaction to them.

Certainly her eye was "out." What a lucky thing she hadn't put on the grey and ostrich feather dress. That would have startled him. She wondered what he would think of the Necker Baby's clothes. But of course men of his type would divide women into those for day and those for evening use. They did not like intermediate and indeterminate varieties, with lips that said "don't" and stockings that said "do," on the "one doesn't know which end to believe" principle. Englishmen were like that, especially the nicest ones. To the Latins, of course, every woman except a mother-in-law was a problem to be solved. But Englishmen did not want to solve women at all. They liked labels in plain figures, so that they knew what to expect. After all, why make life unne-



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cessarily complicated: that was how they thought about it. She considered herself incredibly learned in male psychology. He must be made to forget the mammoth cigarette by being made to talk about himself: that was the way one managed men. She felt as crafty as a young hostess.

"What part of the country do you come from?" she asked. "One always seems to understand a person better when one knows the part of the world they were brought up in. I suppose it's because of what they thought about and did when they were little; and that makes all the difference afterwards, doesn't it?"

He did not at once respond. That was not too subtle, was it? She must try again.

"I mean whether they live in London or in a hunting part of the world or where one shoots." That was clear enough. That ought to make him talk again. When he did not he was so distant, almost formal; but when he was speaking he was so nice. Perhaps underneath he was shy: that was the way with so many Englishmen. Was that what the Continent meant by our spleen?

"Do you know the East coast?" he said. "No? Well, you would not know the little corner of it where we lived. Handford Water, at the top of the Essex coast. There's pretty decent shooting inland and when the winter's hard there's miles of flats and salterns with top-hole wild-fowling. Pretty good sport that! You wouldn't know about it, the women don't go in for it or they didn't."

He paused because he was really uncertain if, in a changed England, women didn't do so. He didn't want to seem disapproving when he hadn't even thought the thing out.

"Are you fond of hunting?" she asked, because he seemed to have lost impetus and to need further encouragement.

"Hunt! Yes I'd like to hunt two days a week. Perhaps I shall when I chuck the Army. Not make a life of it or that, but two days a week or so. Before the war I

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couldn't afford more than an occasional day here and there on hirelings or when some one lent me a mount : not the same thing really, you know. There isn't any hunting to speak of anywhere round our part. Too much water and one comes up against bits of sea, running in everywhere : lot of wire, too, nowadays. No, it isn't any good for that. We went in more for pottering about on water and marshes, ditch-crawling and wild-fowling. No one who hasn't tried would believe what a lot of sport one could pick up round about the creeks north of the Thames ; summer and winter always something to do."

"And you can do it any time of the year, I suppose," Jill ventured.

"It's up on hunting in that : the harder it freezes the better it is for gunning. Then there's eel-spearing and fishing and shrimping. You can find some sort of sport any weather. I daresay it doesn't sound very sporting, but when you've been out all day in a gun-boat and find yourself about evening with home almost out of sight to windward, and a fresh breeze working up and three or four miles of broad water to cross before you can get home, it's a bit of a game."

How his face lighted up when he was interested in his subject, but he needed some comment from her, or he would not go on for fear of boring her.

"It sounds horribly dangerous," she said. "What sort of boats do you use ?"

"Haven't you seen a gun-punt ? It's a long contraption like two plates face to face : rather like a flat fish : about as sea-worthy as a saucer bath, only it's got a bit of deck on it. Both ours at home had sails and didn't travel any so dustily : weatherly little ships : that doesn't mean they'd stand weather, you know, only that they'll go well on a wind, against the wind that is."

"I don't think I should like sitting still in the cold without rowing or paddling," Jill said. "You do it all in the winter don't you, too ?"

"Oh, we don't do overmuch sitting either. One lies flat if there's a bit of a breeze. When you've got spray,

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that's as near ice as it doesn't matter, cutting across you and night gathering beyond the marshes, a gun-punt doesn't give you a good feel; not a bit!"

"I shouldn't think so," said Jill, who loved warmth. "You must have had all sorts of adventures, I suppose."

"Sometimes one did have adventures and a bit more than one wanted," he said.

He was looking into the depths of his Tokay wherein lies the remembrance of the happiness of long ago and forgetfulness of all else. He sipped the wine luxuriantly.

"Splendid fun!"

Time and wine could gild every misery. Any hard blows that Fate had dealt him since those days had vanished into the mellow shadows.

"By Jove, yes. Splendid fun!"

He set down the empty glass, but for a while watched some vision that glistened in it. He looked happy now, Jill thought, and he didn't look as if it often was. The firmness of his lips had relaxed. She could fancy him as he must have been in those Sandhurst days, before that experience, whatever it had been, had left its mark on him. He must have been just like those Verscoyle cousins, colt-like, with ankles and wrists as yet too thin for his hands and feet, with fearless eyes, yet very easily abashed. How good-looking he was, especially now when one saw that the last remnants of the boy were not yet dead. She liked his smooth thick hair. He was just the type of Englishman one wanted foreigners to see.

"I think we ought to be getting outside," he said. "We're the last people in the room."

Jill gathered up her belongings and they passed out of the restaurant.

## CHAPTER III

### Rare Birds and Odd Fish

NEXT morning Jill stayed in her room till after eleven hoping that Captain Wythes might ask her to show him round the town or to play a game of golf with him : but as no word came, she went out rather crest-fallen for a walk by herself. She lunched in the hotel, but he was not to be seen. It was disappointing, for she had looked forward to meeting him again. Indeed she had counted on it, from the way in which he had talked the night before.

The afternoon passed slowly and at tea-time she sat in the lounge, on the chance of his passing through it. But he did not appear and she began to fear that, though she had liked him very much, she had not made any impression upon him and that he preferred being alone to having her society. Perhaps she had been too modern for his taste in spite of having tried not to be : perhaps she had overdone the part and he had thought her dull : yet, when she looked back on it, she had in reality only been herself. And she had fancied that she had had a success with him ! She had been confident that he would want to lunch or dine with her, for he knew no one else in Pest.

People passed her constantly and, each time any one did so, she hoped it might be him. She could not concentrate her attention on the book she was reading, yet she must not keep looking up. She must not let him catch her doing it, and let him think that she was waiting there for him : that would never do. Even apart from one's own pride, it was silly to seem cheap : yet she had wanted to see him again. She was so tired of being alone, and he was so nice and good-looking. Presently old Csaradah

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entered the lounge and bowed to her. It was always the people one didn't want that turned up.

At six she went up to her room and lay down. She had been a fool not to go to the mountain and play golf, as she would have done in the ordinary way. Fool! Besides it was stupid to have expected him to fuss round her immediately. Probably he had gone to call on the Missions: that's what he would have done the first day. She was turning on her bath when the telephone bell rang. She scampered to her bedroom. Captain Wythes was speaking to her, and wanted her to dine with him that evening. What a relief: she had just begun to think that she might not see him any more.

It was ten o'clock and they had moved from the restaurant to the table that had been reserved for them on the low, narrow terrace that led to the drawing-room. There they could sit in comparative solitude leaning on the wrought balustrade and looking down on the rest of the lounge, where tables were so dense that waiters could scarcely work their way amongst them. Across the room, by the great doors of glass and bronze, the *tziganes* were playing tunes from *Phi-Phi*, while the people of all Europe, jammed together like sardines, jabbered at each other.

They had grown quite intimate during dinner and already she seemed to know him quite well, yet it had been difficult to make him talk about himself. He was watching the scene now through the haze of his cigar smoke, quite at home with his elbow on the table and his liqueur glass half empty. How English he was! He liked watching a crowd, but not being in it. General Hawkins and Uncle Dan had been like that.

"Were you and your brother, who was killed on the Somme, the only two?" she asked, sipping a vast wine-glass of Turkish coffee.

"No, no, there was another brother, a younger one, who is out in China now," he answered. Then after a pause he continued the theme. "I don't suppose I'd know him if I ran up against him in the street now. Then

## Rare Birds and Odd Fish

there was a sister, older. She married a fellow who's a colonial Governor, and as a matter of fact I haven't set eyes on her for six years either."

"Your father's dead, is he?" she asked. He nodded.

"Then there was our mother. She was rather old to be our mother, a very frail sort, delicate and that. She didn't enter into what we did very much. I don't think she understood us boys at all: she used to always be hoping that Roddie and I hadn't got wet feet when we came in. We didn't have much that was dry as a rule: but she never seemed to notice that and never missed asking. I think she liked me best, though Roddie was worth six of me. Odd, it always seems the worst one a mother likes. I dunno though, only with Roddie and me it was."

He was silent again, but Jill said nothing, hoping that he would continue.

"Are you the only one yourself?" he asked presently.

She did not want to talk about herself, but she told him about her family, about Kitty mostly. Afterwards, because he asked, she described the home in Sussex, where her childhood had been spent and as she warmed to the subject, she did so at length. She hadn't had any one to talk to about her home and the things she cared for since Tibor Arkozi had gone: Prince Palugay had lived always in the present.

"Our house was much the same," he said. "What was it like? I dunno: it's difficult to explain about places, isn't it?"

"It is difficult to explain about places," she agreed. "Yet it isn't really if one wants to tell some one about anything and they want to understand. It really takes two to understand anything, doesn't it?" He could be quite fluent once he began, only he needed starting on a subject. "Was it white and beams and a slag roof, like ours, or red brick and important looking? Oh you know you can explain if you want to."

"Oh, it wasn't anything to talk about really. A sort of glorified farm, low and grey cement, with round bow

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windows to the drawing-room and dining-room. The garden was a pretty hopeless sort of place. There were a few fine elms behind the house, but they were the wrong side, there wasn't any shelter anywhere : all flat and salt marshes coming up close in front : sedges and reeds in the fields : sort of country one hears peewits all the time. In front of the house the wind used to fairly blow anything one planted out of its bed. There was only grass, that wasn't often cut and looked like cocoanut matting half the summer. The wind used to score the cement that the house was faced in, by slinging sand and dust and stuff along it in the gales. The plaster battlements along my mother's end of the house were half worn away."

The thought made her shudder comfortably as she sipped her coffee. "Was it nearly always windy with you?" she asked.

"It was pretty draughty, no shelter or that, and the sea near. There was tamarisk all round in the front but it didn't do any good, and there was box edging with a tooth out every yard or two. In the winter gales we used to get spray mixed with the rain, although we were a mile or two from the open sea and only on the edge of the salt marshes."

"It doesn't sound very cheerful," she said.

"Perhaps it wasn't, but we didn't mind. Odd how one's fond of a place just because one's known it always. The mist used to drift past the house day after day in winter, as if it would never stop. Out of doors it didn't matter, of course, but in the house it made things pretty cheerless. It was a bit rough on our mother I expect, because she was delicate and couldn't get out much : besides she'd been brought up a lot in Italy and those sort of places. The recesses where the show china and the mandarins used to be, on each side of the dining-room fireplace, used to get damper and damper as the winter went on till the wet used to stand in drops on the paint. Odd how fond I was of it. The colour used to run on the wallpaper in most of the bedrooms, even when it was new." His voice sank reminiscently and for a long time

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he said nothing. Was he thinking of his home still, she wondered. Men like him were funny : one had to keep on encouraging them, even on a subject that interested them : otherwise they would stop talking. They would not do their thinking aloud. Still it was a sign that he liked her, sitting like this in silence : if he did not he wouldn't be so at ease.

"You were very fond of it?" she asked.

"Oh, in the summer it was a jolly place. There was a creek that never dried up, even at Spring tides, within a stone's throw of the house and a view . . . lots wouldn't like it, but I suppose I was used to it. Of course one's seen thousands better, but somehow . . . I dunno . . . Oh, I was used to it. There was a low cement wall, that ran in front of the garden and beyond that salterns for ever and ever and a mud creek here and there, running in. From the bedrooms one could see the real sea in the distance. We used to bathe from the house, though it was a bit muddy at low tide. One used to come back with black legs as if one had boots on : but at high tide it was top-hole bathing and one could dive off the boat stage and there weren't other people about to spoil things. We boys used to bathe stark in the early morning and our old nurse used to say 'such Godless doings could only lead to trouble.' I'm not sure she wasn't right, anyway we didn't any of us strike much luck in after life."

He laughed rather too bitterly, Jill thought. He must have had a pretty rough time of it since those days. She wondered what had happened to him : but the war might have been cause enough to explain anything.

The Microbe and old Csaradah with a white flower in his buttonhole, that made his face look grey and his wrinkles darker than ever, had waded through the crowd and taken a table near by. Probably his rheumatism was bad to-night, she thought. He had never quite recovered from being born in January, he used to say. They bowed to her rather coldly.

"Do you like being out here?" she asked.

"Oh, well enough. I like travelling, and in my job I



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get a lot of that. Then I don't seem to have so many interests since the war, what with dropping out of things and things having changed such a lot. So I'm interested in seeing the mess these Peace Conference Johnnies have got Europe into."

"I liked the work I was doing in Vienna too," she said. "It's nice knowing about things as they really are and it makes newspapers funny reading, doesn't it?"

"Lor' yes. They've no idea in England, not a bit. I've just come back from having a look at brother Serb. Don't know him? No, of course not. I rather took to him. Extraordinary fine fighters by all accounts. But casual! Why as a matter of fact they've still got shell holes in the streets in Belgrade. If you take a cab you go dodging round them. Damn funny, really! And all they are doing is grinding their teeth and sharpening their swords and just spoiling for another packet of trouble. In this last war, they never cared what it was about, but why look a gift war in the mouth, that was their point.

"I was at a public dinner not long back and sat next to a Serb Colonel, extraordinary bird. He'd got half a dozen scars on his face alone, hell of a fellow! He'd been fighting the best part of nine years and he didn't know what to do with himself now. I suggested him trying big game. But he said he'd tried and it wasn't any good: war had spoilt him for it. Later when the glasses had been filled a few times more he woke up a bit and told me that he supposed men were the only things worth killing really, and he'd started a bit too young to change now. He'd been one of the sportsmen that cut the last King and Queen up . . . Draga wasn't she called? Yes, I think so. When they chopped them up, they threw the bits out of the window just to show there wasn't any ill feeling. He talked of it like one would of a day's hunting, yet he was a decent sort, otherwise. Extraordinary sort of chap."

He drained his liqueur glass.

Old Csaradah and the Microbe had left. The party of Hussars had drunk their last toast and were putting on

## Rare Birds and Odd Fish

their coats and swords. The Italian diplomacy and French arms had bowed their parting distrust. Soon all the groups would be broken up, some to sleep, some to play, some to amorous intrigue, and some to plot. This was the time of the night when men had come from perilous errands to Count Arkosi's flat : it was the time when the entertainments and the dancing would be beginning in the casinos : and behind the curtained doors of strange nocturnal dens : it was the time of night when the waiter on her floor had thrown himself into the icy Danube. It was now that the lingering Bolsheviks would be whispering over the stoves, and when the remaining flicker of the White Terror would be abroad. It was horrid to end the night now, just when in Budapest it was at its best.

It would be such fun to go for a walk along the empty echoing streets, where muffled policemen stood with fixed bayonets at the cross-roads. She remembered the Microbe's "to wake at sunset and to watch each dawn, that is how to enjoy life."

"It's been extraordinary decent of you to let me sit and buck to you this evening," he was saying. "You see, except for driving up from Pecs with old 'Enery 'Awkins, I've been alone without a soul to speak to for a fortnight. I don't usually gas away like this, I promise you."

Oh, she didn't want to go to bed. How she would love to go out now and begin the evening over again : but it was no use, he was too English. It would never do to ask him.

"Is there any chance of seeing you to-morrow ?" he asked.

Yes, but why to-morrow. It was so dull just when they had made friends, to go off like this.

"We might go and play golf if you care to," she said. He was seeing her into the lift now. He would love to, he said, at ten. Oh, dear, she didn't want to go to bed now. The gates of the lift clanged between them and cut off his good-night. Up to bed ! And she had been to bed early every night for so long : and just when she was beginning to enjoy herself. What a waste of life !

## CHAPTER IV

### Sea Lavender

**J**ILL and Harry Wythes played golf all the next day and for several consecutive days thereafter. And, though at the end of the play, he went through the formality of asking whether she would be able to do so again on the following day, they must have both known what the answer would be: for, in reality, neither of them had anything else to do. Jill knew no one else in Budapest except the friends of Prince Palugay, and since he and she had parted the Musketeers, probably out of loyalty to him, had not done more than bow to her.

Captain Wythes had called on the British Missions, but there was no one in them who was likely to be able to go about much with him. The Military Mission consisted of only five officers who were busy during the daytime and most of them lived on the further side of the river. The English sailors of the C.I.D. lived at the Hungaria and were interested chiefly in their own affairs. So circumstances threw Jill and him much together.

They used to start for the golf links soon after breakfast, for these were some miles outside the city and on the top of the Schwarenberg heights. To go to them by tram and on foot took nearly an hour. They lunched together daily after they had finished playing and very late, as is the Hungarian custom. There are several little restaurants amongst the hills and they patronized one or other of these. In the evening they usually walked home, well tired.

One night Captain Wythes dined with a British general and on another occasion he was not to be seen at dinner.

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But Jill suspected that he was feeding alone in some obscure restaurant, so as not to seem to be forcing his presence on her too often. Except for these two evenings they dined together each night. After all, nothing could have been more natural : they lived in the same hotel and must have otherwise dined alone. At first he used to sit in the lounge with one eye on the Pester Lloyd and the other on the staircase until Jill appeared, when he would rise and ask if he might sit at her table : but after a while they dined together as a matter of course.

Jill guessed from their glances that the Musketeers, the Necker Baby, and several others had placed the obvious and incorrect interpretation upon their being so much together. To her these days were very happy ones, for she had been a long time absolutely alone and at the mercy of her thoughts. Not to worry at meal-times was a pleasure in itself, and to be out of doors all day with a young Englishman like Captain Wythes was exactly the change she needed after the rather dissipated life she had spent with the Musketeers. Her health improved and, although she had never felt ill in the past, she noticed the difference in herself. Indeed, she wondered sometimes if the dread she had had of the future had not been, in part at least, physical, a morbidity due to being pent up too much in doors. The last winter in Vienna her work had kept her in the Embassy nearly all the daylight hours, and after it she had not felt inclined to take exercise. At first, even in Budapest, she had not been much in the fresh air, as she had been dependent on Glory's habits, and Glory had an American preference for steam heat.

The weather was delicious and over the Plain the sudden Hungarian Spring was changing to summer. Already they had begun to dine out of doors. Soon the restaurant terraces would be a blaze of light till midnight and the Embankment beside the Danube would be thronged with people, listening to the music of the *tziganes* till the small hours. But on the heights the season still tarried : in the woods the air was still heavy with the scent of acacia

## Sweet Pepper

bloom : the last apple blossom still shimmered in the clearings.

Except on Sundays they usually had the golf course to themselves, because to reach it by tram and on foot meant spending most of the day there, and because few Hungarians could afford motors at this time.

From the very first she found Captain Wythes an easy companion. If he was encouraged, he talked interestingly, though he was often bitter in his points of view. This bitterness was chiefly on the surface, and soon Jill found that it was not difficult to make him forget it, if she could induce him to talk about his home and interests. But in any case, as she attributed it to those war experiences of which he never spoke, she found it easy to excuse. About the war itself he would never talk : "that time" he used to call it. Jill discovered one reason, which might in part account for this strength of feeling. He had not been home for some time before the war and had been abroad until it ended. In the meanwhile his mother, to whom he seemed to have been very devoted, had died, his elder brother had been killed and his sister had married and gone abroad.

"When I got back to the old place," he told her, "it wasn't a bit like home : you see, every one was gone. It was all in dust-sheets, with some old care-taker-woman camped out in my mother's sitting-room : never moved beyond it and the kitchen from the look of things. The house always wanted doing up, but my mother never had enough over to do it. But when I got home it was quite a shock to see how things had gone to pieces in those five or six years. There hadn't been any fires, of course, and the damp must have got worse than ever. Some of the doors upstairs wouldn't open till you jerked them half to bits, and till they bent all ways. The carpets in the bedrooms were sodden and there was mildew on everything : my riding-boots were all covered with fur. It was early March ; of course it was raining, that soft stuff that drifts and drifts on for ever.

"I had been looking forward to going down there. An

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uncle had died during the war and left me pretty comfortably off and I'd been thinking what a lot of things I'd do down at home, doing up the house and all that, all kinds of improvements I'd meant to do, pumping engine and light and all manner of gaggets. I'm not a clever fellow, and I didn't somehow think how I'd feel when I got down there. You see, when I was at home last, there were four of us and my mother, and we'd had such times together, and . . . you know the kind of thing. But when I went down there this time, two of us had died, and the other two at the world's end, and the place had been empty and shut up for a couple of years.

"After I'd been into a room or two I didn't want to go on with it. I'm not so soft in the usual line, especially about things like that. I'm not a bit what you'd call . . . a sentimental sort or that, but I went and stood in the dining-room, looking out of the window and waiting for the time to go to catch my train back to London."

The description brought to Jill's mind the thought of waiting with wet feet, to her the quintessence of experienced misery. He was sure to have got wet through, trudging up from the station. Cold, damp, woolly stockings. Ough!

"The dining-room was all cleared and the table had been shoved up in a corner. Two of the leaves had been taken out and stood up against the wall, long bits of polished wood. They put me in mind of those two coffins; only Roddie hadn't had one. Thinking of a thing like that isn't a bit my way, but it just shows, doesn't it? So I stood, looking out of the window, feeling as old as a schoolmaster. Outside the rain was going drip, drip off the scalloped points of the tin verandah.

"There's a path from the dining-room that leads to a ramshackle summer-house where my mother used to sit and watch the tide coming in. There wasn't much else to do sometimes. She used to call it the Grove of Melancholy because she said she never went there except when she was like that, which was pretty often. She was rather

## Sweet Pepper

old for her age, and it must have been pretty lonely for her, I expect. You see, our father died a long while back and she'd been brought up in London and Rome. Somehow she'd never taken to the country at all : only as the house was our own and we were not well off, she went on living there. Since I'd been home last, the rhododendrons that never flowered and the laurels that just hadn't died, had straggled across the path, so that you couldn't have got along it without brushing past them. No one had been down the path for a long while : not since my mother died, I expect. The bushes were swaying about in the wind. It looked as if . . . that finished me somehow and put me off going out of doors. I didn't even go and have a look at the old gun-punts, that were laid up in the stables."

He referred more than once to that home-coming : it had made a lasting impression on him. During those lean years he had been looking forward to it and had expected something very different. To Jill it seemed that both he and she had been left stranded by the war ; she because her family fortune had vanished, he because during " that time " all the old ties had been destroyed and because he had found it difficult to make fresh ones. He had not watched the transitions, quick enough in themselves, and to him England seemed unreasonably changed.

" Before the war I had been pretty badly off," he told her, " and had had to go easy. Then, after my uncle died, I kept myself going out there, thinking of what I'd do when I got home. In the end my turn came, but it seemed too late." His friends had died or were abroad and the old haunts had vanished, or altered out of recognition. He had felt a stranger in England, " like those poor old duffers who dither their lives away in India, planning what they'll do when they get their pensions, and when they come home they find no one knows them or cares two hoots who they were or what they are, or what they'd done, or anything about them. They have to settle down and see all they'd been planning wasn't more than smoke. You know the type." While he himself had been away

## Sea Lavender

so many of the old standards to which he had learned to look, had changed, or rather those who had held them had been killed or had sunk into obscurity. So, when he returned, he found himself a survival, though only in the middle thirties.



## CHAPTER V

### The Old School

**A**BOUT Jill's recent life he did not seem curious. He had heard her tell General Hawkins that she had been staying with an American woman who had just gone home. Once or twice he asked questions about Glory which Jill was able to answer truthfully. But she was glad enough that he was not more inquisitive, for she did not want to be led into a maze of prevarications.

One day an incident occurred which might have led her into awkward explanations but, as it happened, it passed off without difficulty. As they were passing through the suburbs of the town, they saw an officer in uniform practising his chestnut mount over some very high timber, in the *ménage* attached to some barracks. The animal, a thoroughbred, was a beautiful jumper. Captain Wythes was anxious to stop and watch. He was greatly struck by the performances of both horse and rider, so they waited until the exercise was over. On his way back to the barracks the officer walked his charger close to them, and as he did so Jill saw that it was Major Zonay. He saluted her gravely and for an instant the hard line of his lips softened, but the expression in his bleak eyes never altered. In a moment he had passed them, and they could see only his square shoulders and his flat back, splendid with its scrolls of gold cord. When he had been jumping he had seemed part of his horse, but now he was stiff as ever, as stiff as his expression. What a grim frozen soul he was, Jill thought.

"By Jove, they're a pair of good-lookers, your friend and his mount," Harry Wythes said to her. "Who is he?"

## The Old School

"A Hungarian officer I know," she said a little lamely, and then added, "a Major Zonay."

"What, *the* Zonay, but of course it must be," he said. "By Jove, I'm sorry I didn't look a bit harder at him. I was looking at his mount most. Zonay! Was he now! You know all about him and what he does, I suppose."

"I know what he's supposed to do," Jill said. It would not be fair to her friends not to say all she could for him. "He was supposed to have been the head of the White Terror people: but they say here the stories are nearly all not true. I knew a great friend of his and he told me that it was chiefly rubbish and made up for propaganda against the country. He said that if some of the young officers of his detachment . . . Zonay commands a sort of regiment, you know . . . had done things, they'd done them off their own bat: and then only to people who really had deserved it; who'd committed murders in the Bolshevism and those sort of things."

"Oh, I bet they deserved it all right," he said, laughing. "I've seen a few of the Bolshie brew myself. But Zonay! I'm sorry I didn't take more stock of him. By Jove, that fellow's made a name for himself. There isn't a Jew-run newspaper in the world that doesn't treat him to half a column of abuse, gratis every week. If you went into a restaurant in Prague or Pressburg and just said, 'Zonay is coming . . . ' just like that . . . you'd see all the gentlemen with noses and flap ears slipping under the tables. So that was the sportsman, was it? I really only got a squint of him, but he looked an ugly beggar to get the wrong side of. Rum sort he must be. Might be an Englishman to look at him, mightn't he? Shouldn't care for the job myself, but he's damn useful in a place like this and at a time like this: a sort of . . . what was that book. . . . Oh, yes, a sort of Scarlet Pimpernel, only they've bagged that colour for the other side, haven't they? If it wasn't for his lot I suppose there wouldn't be any Government at all east of Switzerland."

## Sweet Pepper

They had started to walk on when he turned and said to her so suddenly that she almost jumped, "How did you come to know so many Hungarians?"

What was she going to say? How much should she tell him? She was beginning to feel panic, when a fortunate diversion in the form of a company of soldiers swinging out of the barrack gate spared her from having to answer. Harry Wythes became very intent on their bearing and especially of their equipment.

"Bet I know where those rifles came from," he said. . . . "Dashed funny, too, really . . . when one thinks of it. It doesn't do to be too particular, does it?"

So the incident closed.

Fortunately he never asked her how she came to know the "Musketeers," for as a rule he was not interested in people, who they were or what they did. It had only been Major Zonay's appearance and his horse that had attracted his notice.

All day Jill was entirely happy, happier far than she had been since she had left Vienna. Tibor Arkozi had been generous and chivalrous to her: he had never let her feel the *chagrin* of her position: but though their association had been so intimate, to her he had always been half unreal. He was not a man who would be able to find inspiration in any woman. The things that called him had been woman's enemy since history began. His spirit was always away, restless, exploring, seeking in the yesterday and the to-morrow the task of his race. He would never, she felt, have watched her while she slept. His interest had never been of that kind.

Harry Wythes was so different. He was not bespoken to any cause: while he was with one he belonged to one. She could divert his thoughts when he was depressed: she could try her power over him. He was really interested in her, not perhaps in what she had done or what she thought, for that was not his way; but for her herself. She wasn't a slave that held a cushion for him. She was conscious too, that she was doing him good. Already he was less bitter. The slight inhumanity, or was it only

## The Old School

mental aloofness which she had at first rather resented, was passing off.

Sometimes she chafed him about his exactitudes : it wasn't any good being a dried-up old exquisite nowadays, she told him : the day of dandyism in dress and standards was over and the knut had bounded into its place. Certainly he was thinking less of those experiences, whatever they had been, which had marked so deeply.

She made him talk much of his early enthusiasms, of fishing and of bird life, feeling instinctively that by so doing she was leading him back across the bridge of time and making him forget what had happened since those days. From his apologies and fear of wearying her she could guess that it was a long while since he had had so sympathetic a listener. Living altogether with men had been bad for him, she thought, and without perhaps being conscious of it she began to mother him. His reserve gradually disappeared : his themes grew longer and less self-conscious : he accepted her as one who understood and to whom one could talk even of his ambitions.

As she grew to know him better, she realized that what she had thought to be a strain of "being superior" was in fact something rather different. He was a traditionalist, ready to take what profit or suffer what loss his traditions might bring, but not to throw them away. He was willing to adventure to arm's length into the unknown but no further, unless he saw where the next step would lead him. And being such, he found himself in a world where people had let go the guiding hand of the past, without having a star of vision by which to steer. In this he was exactly the opposite of Tibor Arkozi, who saw a light far off, perhaps only a will-o'-the-wisp, and set off without thought towards it.

Besides this, as time went on, it became clear to Jill that it was not so much that he disapproved of the altered world as that he could not understand many aspects of it. The war had kept him abroad during those critical years and, not having watched the process of these changes, he could not make allowances for them. After a while she

## Sweet Pepper

realized that although he had only taken up his present task because he had found himself at a loose end, yet now he had become wholly absorbed in this aftermath of war.

He never told her the exact nature of his work, but she heard incidents of it. Like most other Englishmen in Central Europe he often found that his sympathies were not on the side of those nations which chance had ranged on England's side during the war.

"The more I see of the rest of the lot we had in our pack," he said to her once, "the more I wonder how the deuce we pulled it off at all. Some of our team weren't better than play-actors dressed up as soldiers and some of them weren't even straight by us half the time. To read the papers makes me sick: all this tosh about comradeship in arms and the rest of that drivel. We're a damn sight too modest as a nation. If only the people at home could see what the British private soldier really did. But it's cackle, cackle and giving everybody else the praise. One learns a thing or two out here, getting about and hearing both sides. If we want a character you've only to go to the other side: they know what we were worth. You've heard all that sort of thing yourself. I suppose you must have heard a good deal one way and another and seen some queer things with old 'Enery 'Awkins."

"Oh, sometimes we did," Jill said, "but not really: only on paper. We didn't see the men we were writing about, or the places, or the things. You've seen the actual people and been to the places we were writing about. That must have been much more interesting."

"It was sometimes," he admitted. "One time I met Bela Khun: rather a risky business it was, but I got the chance and I wasn't going to miss it."

"Do tell me about it."

They were sitting on the top of the Schwarenberg Heights after playing golf. For a while he was silent, looking out over the vast distances of the Plain.

"Go on," she said, lying back and gazing up into the sky.

## The Old School

"You know about things here, a year back or more when they made Bela Khun President, or big noise, or whatever a Bolshie ruler is.

"Things started happening pretty fast then. All these comic Peace Conference nations round about thought, suppose we make a noise like a hero girding on his armour, and when the Soviet in Budapest happens to topple over, we'll get the credit. Amongst others Brother Tschekkh started cutting capers, till Bela Khun scratched up a sort of an army and went at him. Need I say what happened to Mr. Tschekkh?"

"You're always down on everyone who isn't English, aren't you, Harry?" Jill laughed.

"Oh, no I'm not: but Tschekhs are a different proposition from the Austro-Bosches and that lot. Good thing, that old 'Enery 'Awkins said. . . . Jolly good it was. . . . at one of those interminable confabs. The Tschekkh representative wanted old 'Enery to say that he thought they ought to have something more than they'd got, but 'Enery just screwed his eye-glass in a bit tighter and blinked a bit. Then he said, or he's supposed to have, 'Wella, yer know, they've given yer the whole of Slovakia for it, without asking the Slovaks what they think of yer. That ought-ter be enough. Why they only gave Judas thirty pieces of silver.' Just like old 'Enery. Didn't you ever hear that?"

"No, I missed it somehow," Jill said. "Any way we didn't send that part of the conference to the F.O. or the War House."

"So the big-wigs in Paris got a bit upset and they thought Bela Khun and his Bolshies would link up with the other Bolshies of Lenin's, so I was sent off by the powers that be or think they do, in a 20 Vauxhall to tell Bela Khun to go home and be good.

"As it happened, except for the funk I was in, it was really the finest thing in the world. First thing I ran into was the headquarters of a Tschekkh army corps, which was commanded by a French general I'd had a certain amount to do with in Prague, so I thought I'd drop in and hear his

## Sweet Pepper

news. The last time I'd met the old man, was at a public dinner and he'd been bucking a bit about his army corps. He wasn't more than a colonel at home, I expect : infernally capable : knew his job from A to Z.

My stunt was Supreme Council and he was belligerent, so we really hadn't anything to do with each other. It was a big thing for me and I wanted to crow a bit to some one. When I got in there, everything was a mess, typewriters and papers and things, all upside down and endwise. The poor old chap was packing his bag, bunging in his hair brushes and things himself. His servant had done a bolt, I expect, and he was chucking 'em in as if he wanted to break 'em, his nightshirt with red crochet on it and all his yellow boots and things : you can't guess how comic a Frenchman's toilet gear is at any time. I don't mean I wanted to rub it in, cause he was a decent old bird, but I just couldn't help doing it : national buck, don't you know."

Jill turned on her elbow and watched him. He was filling his pipe with minute attention. The telling of the adventure evidently amused him, for he was smiling to himself. It was pleasant to lie in the warm sun and listen to his deep even voice.

"Go on," she said. "What did the French General say ?"

"He didn't say much, but I guessed what was up," Harry continued. "His blessed Tschekkh corps hadn't even waited for orders. Lord he was sick to see me. I was jolly sorry for him, and I wouldn't have gone in if I'd known. It wasn't his fault : he couldn't stop 'em. Lord he'd enough to worry him, poor chap, watching his work just melting away and fancying he'd be sent home and *limoged*, and living on next to nothing for the rest of his life in some moth-eaten provincial town. Of course I saw I wasn't exactly welcome, so I saluted the poor old chap and cleared off.

"I got back into the Vauxhall and we went on. You never saw anything like it : siege guns that hadn't fired a shot, left at the side of the road : thousands of pounds of

## The Old School

brand new transport left in the ditches. Presently we got clear of the thick of them and let her out a bit.

"All of a sudden we came on the fun. A big stretch of flat country and battalions of them simply skeltering across it, not a shot anywhere. At the back of them were perhaps a couple of troops of t'other fellow's cavalry. Upon my word watching them I forgot the thing was supposed to be in earnest.

"When they'd chased brother Tschekh off the map, they came and had a sniff at me. They galloped round me just like Red Indians going to round up a mail coach on a cinema. I got the driver to stop to avoid mistakes, so they came up and had a squint at me. They probably hadn't seen a British officer before. They thought me a hell of a joke. I'd rigged up as smart as I could, sake of the Army and that; besides it does tell, even when you're dealing with democrats and the unwashed generally.

"In the evening of the next day I got to the place where I was to have my interview with Bela Khun."

"Was he like his pictures?" Jill asked.

"Dunno. He wasn't a pretty-faced sort of a cove. What did he say? Oh, the usual sort of thing when someone calls. Hoped I'd had a pleasant journey and that: not a bit what one had expected. Did it on purpose I suppose.

" 'So you've been sent to tell me to retire my Army, have you, Captain?' he said. I told him that was about the size of it.

" 'That's just what I was going to do,' he said. Then he told me how things were with his crowd. While they'd been saying shoo to the Tschekh, a big Roumanian army had been worrying them on the other side and there was a White counter revolution on. (We didn't know about Horthy and the Szegid crowd in Prague then.) That's what made me think he was rather a big man in his way. No bluff or bish of that kind.

"I told him that if he was going to retire that was all right and I'd wish him good-day. Most extraordinary fellow he was, Bela Khun. After I'd been sent there to



## Sweet Pepper

tell him to clear off, most hostile and unfriendly-like, what did he do but begin to explain to me why he'd got to do it.

" 'It's only time I want,' he said, 'only time.' He'd got the whole thing pretty pat. He'd worked it all out. But this counter-revolution had cooked his schedule, he said.

" I told him I was a soldier and not a politician, and that I'd got orders and not a pack of ideas to attend to, and that I must let my people know that he'd go home quiet, because the big bugs in Paris were all on the hop about it. But he'd got an audience and he wasn't going to let me off.

" His game was up, he kept saying, and then he kept fretting over it at me. He got out a map and started talking about interior lines and that, like a newspaper strategist.

" Then he wanted to know why, when I'd been captured, as he put it, I'd been flying a Union Jack. Was England at war with him? I looked a bit sheepish at that, because I suppose I should have been under an international flag, only I really hadn't the face to go about in a British uniform under a flag like a part worn dish-cloth. I told the old boy that. He thought that first-class fun, no end of a joke.

" 'Why, there's only one international flag and that's the red one,' he said, then he grew serious and started talking quickly."

" What language did you talk? " Jill broke in.

" German. It was a queer line of stuff he put up: half Red international and half mad patriotic. Gave me a regular old lecture on Soviet Government and that. I suppose he was a born spouter and I was something fresh in the way of an audience. Curious fellow! One moment he'd have the corner of his little pig eyes on one to see what effect he was having, the next you would have sworn he was in dead earnest and carried away as if he was inspired by all that stuff of his.

" He'd never had a proper chance, he said, because

## The Old School

Hungary was the only country left where people still hung on to tradition. Then all at once he went off the rails and forgot Bolshevism, and started spouting Hungarian history at me.

I explained that I wasn't over fond of history at the best of times, and that I was in a bit of a hurry at the moment. That didn't stop him.

"Did I know why Slovakia had been taken from them? Wasn't President Wilson connected by marriage with Masyrik, the Tschekkh leader? According to Bela Khun old man Wilson had carved up a state out of Austria and out of Hungary to make his relation President. Did I wonder that they'd turned Bolshevik?"

"Then all at once he forgot his patriotism and being an orator and that.

"And that's how I got my chance," he said: just like a coper, telling me how he's done another man down over a horse or something: sort of sly confidential, as if you'd see the joke too. Extraordinary fellow, no shame about anything.

"The game was up. He hadn't a ghost of a chance in keeping his end up. But I wasn't to think that Bolshevism was finished: devil a bit! It was just the end of the Magyar chapter: it was only one chapter in the big Red book, that's what he said.

"Then all at once he dropped the confidential style and got like a parson. Europe was rotten: Christianity was dead. Everything had been rotten for years and the war had just finished it off. There were only two faiths left, the big red star as he called it and the white star of counter-revolution. These were faiths that people believed: the rest of us were only set on grab and make.

"Give him time, he kept saying, and he'd set Europe ablaze: give him a month and he could link up with Lenin.

"Then quite of a sudden, he stopped his lecture and was offering me some drink (sort of sticky liqueur the monks made out of pears: we were in a monastery). I drank a little glass of it and he drank two coffee cups full. As

## **Sweet Pepper**

soon as we'd done, he packed me off, for all the world like a little schoolboy that's been out to tea.

“‘Good-bye, Englishman. Remember if you’ve got faith that’s all that matters.’ And before I’d got out of the door he was busy with his despatches and things.”

## CHAPTER VI

### Jill Loves

TEN days passed and Jill began to dread the time when Harry would leave Budapest. In so many ways she had grown to be dependent upon him. If she had done something for him in making him feel less bitterly about life, certainly he had done much for her, because he had helped her to find again her self-respect. This, though perhaps she had not been conscious of it, had suffered greatly during the past weeks, for in woman more than in man self-respect seems to be dependent upon public opinion : a less roving habit may have made their neighbour's esteem more important to them.

She was constantly with Harry Wythes, who knew nothing of her recent life ; and as he took her for what she appeared to be, he enabled her to regain, or at any rate to feel that she had regained, her old position in the world. Her youth and her education and her lack of cynicism helped her in this. The change in her outlook on life had never been great. Being with him all day, she had little opportunity for brooding over the time when she would be alone once more. And living so much in the open air she was so healthily tired at night that she soon slept. So, though she dreaded his departure, she did not analyse her feelings and had not for some while realized that it was not so much the thought of being alone, as of being without him that was unbearable to her.

Being alone would be like going back into the wilderness : the thought of it was dull dread, which came to her, if she lay awake. She had had anxieties before : they gnawed at one, but in time one grew used to the pain.

## Sweet Pepper

But the idea that when Harry Wythes left her she might never see him again was a sudden fear, leaping in her brain in the uncertain hours of the night. She sat up in bed. A faint light from the river, filtering through the net blinds, glinted on her loose hair : everything in the room was distinguishable, nothing clear.

No ! Not that ! Anything else : that she just couldn't bear. She pressed her clenched hand against her lips : the nails drove into her palms. No : anything but that, anything. She would do anything else : work anywhere. She could face anything but losing him : she couldn't give him up. She must see him sometimes. She loved him.

The realization burst on her and took her utterly unawares. Her hands relaxed slowly and she let them fall limply downwards. She loved him : that was it. For a while she knelt there on her bed, her brain almost numb, gaping at the dull emptiness through the open windows. No light, no colour, no stars, no thought, nothing. No joy, no remorse, only blank wonder. The unexpectedness and the magnitude of the realization had left her half stunned. So love came like that ! She hadn't known. She'd never loved any one before. When Owen had been killed she had cried sentimentally : in a sisterly way she had been fond of Tibor Arkozi. But love was something new, beyond all experience.

She was astonished : she hadn't anticipated it, and she had not realized how it had come about. Yet everything had combined to prepare her for it, her loneliness, her return to a healthy outdoor life, the very season of the year. But she had never guessed : never ! He had come too, just when the Spring was at its full, when the heavy scent of the acacia drifted through the woods. Were the old Magyar songs right ? Was there magic in it ? In the forest everything was stirring, wistfully looking for what it knew not. Love was abroad : even now in the night air there was restlessness : in the very room the shadows livened.

No, that was too much to ask ! She could not bear to lose him, now that she knew. She did not ask much : she

## Jill Loves

could do without his love. If he didn't want her, he need never know she cared. She could do without the physical side altogether. She wouldn't want kisses, only to be near him: she would do without embraces. . . .

Then there came to her the remembrance of his bare arms as she had seen them only a few hours before, when with his shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows, he had sat by her side on the Janos Hegy: such strong hairy arms, with thin wrists, so characteristic of him, not like every one else's arms: the muscles that moved like snakes only just under the skin. And, as she remembered his arms, she knew that it wasn't any good deceiving herself. It wasn't any good. She wanted those arms round her now: to rest her head on his shoulder: to feel his arm round about her, his hand below her breast. She wanted to lean against him and to feel that strong arm of his, drawing her tighter to his side, . . . tighter . . . tighter . . . hurting her.

She wanted it now, dreadfully, just dreadfully. It was horrible of her. And she never wanted any one close to her before. Dreadful!

What was she going to do? She hadn't a right to be loved by any one now. He didn't know about all that, and yet he didn't love her. She wasn't the sort men really loved only . . . and he didn't even want her: and there she was, pining to have his arms round her, wanting them more than anything else in the world. She ought to be ashamed: and she wasn't even that. God, it was awful! She bent her head on her knees and began to sob painfully. It hurt her to breathe.

No good! She wasn't any good: a cheap, dirty little creature: and she'd have bartered everything to feel his arms round her now, to be able to lean on him and sob against his chest. Oh, the joy of being comforted by him. She hadn't been comforted for years. Her mother hadn't been any good for that. She was all alone: no one cared: she was like a stray dog. Oh, to be comforted. And thinking of him by her side, she must unconsciously have yielded to an imaginary pressure, for

## Sweet Pepper

she lost her balance and slipped softly from her kneeling position on to her side. There, lying as she had fallen, she wept in shamed misery till, after a long time, she dropped asleep.

In the morning, when she awoke, her mood was quite changed. The sun streamed through the windows and had warmed her where she lay, for she was still curled up outside the blankets, just as she had been when she went to sleep.

Things were not as bad as they had seemed. There was no talk of his going away yet. Anything might happen. She was not going to let herself be morbid. Of course anything might happen : she wasn't bad looking. She got up and looked into the dressing-table mirror. The sun showed dark and golden lights in her hair. Her cheeks were flushed with sleep : the colour of them was still soft and even, as in childhood. Her eyes were bright. The lilac nightgown suited her. No, she didn't look older than when she had been in London. Things weren't so bad. Birds were singing in the trees below her window : a golden film flickered on the waters of the Duna. Not a bad world ! She lit a cigarette and went into the bathroom.

That afternoon they did not play golf, but wandered through the beech woods on the further slopes of the Janos Mountain. Harry was in high spirits and they ran races and pelted each other with leaves. After a while they sat down on a bank and threw stones at a tree stump.

He was quite close to her and, leaning on her elbow, she watched him. How good looking he was. At first she had only thought him smart : but his were the sort of good looks that grew on one. His profile was lean, strongly moulded : an eager face now, one that had been meant to be happy. At this moment it was happy, but his brown eyes never quite lost that indefinable look of pain.

Jill smoked in silence. It was delicious to sit like this and watch him playing : to have him so close to her. He had been carrying his coat and now was in a striped

## Jill Loves

white and red shirt. His sleeves were rolled up, just as she had remembered in those night hours, but her mood was not the same as it had been then.

He was just the right distance from her now. The need of his arm about her had passed. It had belonged to the night. Her depression and her self-contempt had gone too. But her feelings towards him had not changed. She loved him : she would always love him, whatever happened. Perhaps he could not love her. He could have her if he wanted her : she didn't want anything in return. A thrill passed through her at the thought of self-sacrifice for him. Leaning on her elbow she watched him lovingly. Didn't he know ? How could he help knowing ? She had never been able to act and now she wasn't even trying. It didn't seem to matter. Just then he turned round and looked full at her. He must have noticed : she began to blush, but he went on throwing stones.

" You are looking jolly this afternoon," he said between two vicious shots. Jill, watching him, marvelled at the blindness of men.

Next day an incident happened that set Jill wondering. They were on the Janos Mountains and wandering again in the beech woods, but lower down the slopes, when they came to a boggy ravine, where a stream oozed slothfully through the soggy ground. Jill was wearing white shoes and stockings, for the weather had grown so hot that she had taken to muslin frocks.

" Couldn't we go round ? " she asked. " I don't want to get my feet wet."

" All right, but I expect we'll have to go back almost to the top to get round above where the water comes up. I could give you a lift across if you wouldn't mind."

" Don't fall down, that's all," she said : and before she had had time to realize it she was in his arms and being carried across the marshy valley.

" Not much of a weight, are you ? " he laughed.

Jill shook her head : she didn't want to talk. He carried her so high that the ground seemed a long way off



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and his head was against her breast. Her heart was beating so thunderously that he must surely hear it against his ear. How strong he was : it was obviously no effort for him to carry her : there was still spring in his step. How tightly he held her. She abandoned herself luxuriously to his strength. They were across on dry ground again now.

" I'll take you on to that tree," he told her and trotted on for a hundred yards or so. When he came to it, he let her slip through his arms till her feet were on the fallen trunk. Then he released her not at once but gradually. Had he taken her so far because he liked having her in his arms ? Was that why he had let her go so hesitatingly ? She was almost sure that that had been the reason. For a moment or two they stood so, still very close to each other, a wonderful moment. Jill was nearly shivering : she could scarcely bear the suspense. Would he kiss her ? And then they turned and walked down the hill.

## CHAPTER VII

### By the Waters

“**P**ENNY, Jill,” Harry said. They were lying on the dry bracken of the year before on the top of the Gellert Hill.

“As a matter of fact I wasn’t thinking of anything in particular,” Jill answered, without looking round.

“Liar . . . aren’t you?”

To-day he was quicker and more cheerful than she was.

“Well nothing that would interest you,” she answered.

“Only about what I shall do . . . not now . . . later I mean.”

“When you get home?”

“Yes,” she said, though her thoughts had not travelled as far as that.

“Is it much of a job getting work?” he asked.

She told him vaguely of how she and Kitty depended on what they earned, though she said nothing of the difficulties of such a life. She did not mention Kitty’s troubles or her own anxieties, but she told him a little of their plan about the farm.

“Oh, one will find something.” She was purposely vague even to herself. She was not going to let the future spoil the present more than she could help.

“One just thinks sometimes . . .” she added.

He nodded. “Pretty rotten world, eh? Beastly hard on a girl. Of course for a man . . . we’re brought up differently.”

“I’ll be all right,” she said. She did not want to be pitied: that would encourage her to pity herself.

“Life ain’t always a bed of roses,” he mused, and whistled softly through his teeth.

## Sweet Pepper

" You haven't had too easy a time yourself, have you ? " Jill asked him. Anything to keep him from asking questions about her future. She could not bear it . . . not just now. All day she had felt sorry for herself and her nerves had been on edge. She couldn't discuss the future now . . . she couldn't really. She worried about the future every night for hours after she was in bed. He must not ask her about it : if he did she knew that she would cry.

Her question turned the train of his thoughts, or at any rate he did not continue his questions. For a while they were silent. Just below them at the foot of the cliff ran the Duna, and on it the gay little ferry steamers, the vast black and white barges, and the clean white liners of the M.F.T.R. surged or drifted. Below them the Gellert Bridge hung like a child's toy across the wide stream : every now and then a toy electric tram car appeared from nowhere, crossed the bridge and disappeared into nowhere on the other side. Buda was hidden from them by the trees, but Pest on the opposite bank lay like an open map, stretched upon the floor. She could see the splendid curves of the embankment reaching up stream to the Margaret Island and to the open country beyond. The floating baths, the wharfs, the boulevards, and line of great hotels and, set like their prototype at Westminster, the Gothic Parliament Houses rising from the water.

" No I've not found life too easy, not always," he answered after a long pause, " but it wasn't the way things happened : it was what they did me out of : just dished everything for me."

He stopped again and resumed his melancholy whistling.

" Dished things right and proper for me and no mistake ! "

Jill, her chin in her hands, watched a little ferry boat struggle out from the bank and begin to fight its way across the current. A light breeze stirred her hair. Far overhead the wind must have been stronger, for the vast fleecy clouds were travelling swiftly.

" Won't you tell me about it ? " she asked softly. She

## By the Waters

had a longing for his confidence, for something of him that was for herself only. "I do want to know," she added presently.

"Nothing much to tell," he said at length. "It boils down to almost nothing. I got knocked over in August '14 and spent the war, all bar the last few months, in Germany."

She waited in silence. What did one say? Perhaps she ought not to ask any more: yet that would seem too sudden an evaporation of interest, as though it was something to be ashamed of. No, that would never do.

"Did they treat you very badly?" she asked.

"'Twasn't that so much. It was the way it put the hat on everything I wanted to do."

"Yes?"

"Trouble was I was such a devilish keen soldier in those days.

"I passed out of Sandhurst pretty high and then I went out to India for a bit. I swotted up Hindustani and kept my French and German going. I was going to the Staff College as soon as ever I'd got service enough. I was pretty lucky and might really have done well. I was counting on the war . . . I was one of those who thought it was coming . . . to give me my chance, quick promotion and mentions and that. Out in India I used to ride and play tennis as much as any one and after that I used to sit up at night, mugging at things in my bungalow. Jove, I was keen! I got quite a name for it with the authorities.

"My battalion was at Malta when the war came. I was pleased as Punch about it. Everything seemed rosy and then luck goes and does the dirty on me, and I get knocked out and nabbed, before I'd had half a day of it. And after that there I was, wasting the whole war, a prisoner. The people of my seniority I knew were going ahead all the time.

"It doesn't sound anything, but I'd made it my life. It was my ambition and that. A girl wouldn't understand, for they don't go in for that kind of thing. Why,

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it was pretty well the only thing I thought of. Now it's all over. Fellows I knew, have got on like the dickens and I'm just where I started. However hard I swotted at things now, what's the good? They'd say, why he didn't even have experience at the front. No one would take me seriously. I shall chuck it when this job's up.

"Of course I'm comfortably off now, but if you know how much rather I'd not have a cent and have my chance in front of me. I felt so certain . . . but I dare say I wouldn't have done any good."

He broke off and lit a cigarette. He was living it all over again now, Jill felt: she didn't like to look at him.

"Were you badly hit?" she asked.

"No, that was what made it so damn silly. I only got knocked over on the head by a bit of a splinter. Most of what I saw might have been manœuvres. I was in support. Then a lot of sportsmen in red bags appeared from the front and started evaporating towards safety. After that we got orders to reinforce. We went up pretty quick and things began getting uncomfortable: bullets knocking up the dust . . . and that sort of stuff . . . more red backsides streaking off for Paris or the Pyrénées. We'd just got down to it . . . got our second wind as it were . . . when I got in the way of my bit of shell. They'd got me in a Bosche dressing station when I woke up. Lord, I was wild!"

He was silent for a while. Poor Harry, Jill thought, he would not take a thing like that lightly.

"Did they treat you very badly?" she asked.

"Pretty rotten at times: varied from place to place, you know. You see I was always trying to escape and you can't expect 'em to exactly encourage that. I didn't get out till the sixth time. You'll guess what they meant. I didn't mind getting nabbed the first two or three times: that seemed only luck, but the fourth time they got me I nearly crocked up."

He was silent again and Jill began to wonder if he had finished, when he went on.

"Some camps were just hell, some weren't so bad. It

## By the Waters

depended a lot on what the Hun thought about one. They're such unexpected birds, you can't tell what'll make them get their claws out and what'll tickle 'em. You never knew."

Jill watched him as he lay looking down over the city. "You must have had a ghastly time of it," she said.

"Oh, it wasn't that I minded. I was a lot better off than the people in the trenches . . . and a damned sight safer for that matter. Matter of fact, when I got away into Denmark, I was beginning to feel rather bucked up with life, and when I got to London and the people at the War House were very decent and complimentary, I really was pretty bucked. It was only when I got back to soldiering again, that I saw how things were. The officers in my battalion were all new, bar one or two. They'd seen a lot and were old soldiers, as things went. I don't blame 'em, but they didn't take me very seriously as a soldier.

"Naturally they all thought I was a venerable sort of fossil. They were quite decent about it, but they were all war substitutes by that time. Very plucky and quite good boys many of them, but some of them made one wonder a bit. I dare say I made them wonder too, only differently. They'd done extraordinarily well, and I think they tried to be decent to me. But anyhow I saw I was a Rip van Winkle out there, just as I had been at home. I was done for as a soldier. Too much water had gone under bridges, while I'd been in Germany.

"Of course I could have worried on at regimental work, but I'd missed all my chances . . . this life: everything. And I'd planned the devil of a future for myself. If you knew how ambitious I'd been and that, you know what it meant to me. Roddie being gone made a difference too. I suppose I'd got a bit wild doing that solitary confinement business out there: anyhow I found lots of the fellows were half scared of me. I didn't try to snap them up, but they couldn't make me out. Anyhow, we hadn't much in common, except the picture on our buttons. It was difficult for them too, I expect. You see they couldn't

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somehow help being on the defensive and seeing things that weren't meant: that sort are sometimes. They just thought me a bear with a sore head. I swear I tried to get inside things with them.

"There really wasn't anything to be done and I jacked it up. It was all I'd ever cared about, and I swotted at it. Pretty rotten luck really!"

"Poor old thing," Jill whispered. She loved him so at this moment that it was difficult not to take his hand and comfort him. Then quite unexpectedly he took hers.

"Decent of you to be sorry," he said. "Odd thing, except officially, I've never told any one about it before. Though now, of course . . . but I never felt I could tell any one about it . . . not till you."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Dappled Sunlight

**F**OR a long while they lay so, in silence, Jill with one hand under her chin gazing over the river and the misty honeycomb of the city : Harry, his fingers lightly touching her other hand, turned on his side and watching her. Yet, close as they were, in thought they were worlds apart.

So, that had been the cause of his depression. How he must have suffered, poor Harry, she thought. There it was, the war again, always the war. They were alike in that, victims of war. If it hadn't been for the war Harry would be making the name that he wanted for himself, getting on, and she would be . . . she couldn't tell what, but she would be in more comfortable circumstances. . . . Some one quite different, thinking differently, more like her rich cousins . . . only nicer. Now she was something that didn't bear thinking about. The war had changed everything : what she had done hadn't been forced on her, not quite : yet what other chance had she had ? The life she had chosen hadn't been the result of rashness or of panic : she had considered her course : she had figured out what the cost might be, but she had never understood what mattered : she had never known the currency in which she would have to pay : she had thought in mere figures and terms, not in realities. She had never been in love. How could she have known what love was worth ?

You couldn't learn about it at second hand. People had been writing about it for thousands of years and had explained nothing. It hadn't mattered how well they wrote, one could feel the beauty without understanding



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to what it was dedicated : they had explained love no more than a cathedral explains God. It was like trying to explain the sun to some one who had never seen it. The poems and books made it seem wonderful, but one had only understood through one's brain. But love had nothing to do with the brain, she knew that now : it was everywhere else, at one's finger tips, in one's throat, behind one's eyes, everywhere but never in the brain.

She hadn't known what she had covenanted to pay : she hadn't understood the value. For a moment these two thought alike, for he too was thinking of values, only very different ones. Oh, if she could have the last few months over again, and know what she . . . futile, eternal cry ! If she had gone back to face the future in London, she would never have met Harry. Would being chaste have very much mattered to her then : wouldn't it have been only a negative state ? Didn't virginity only become precious when one wanted to give it away. Must a girl always go on waiting for a Fairy Prince, who may never come ? Hadn't the very belief that he never would, led her to the course she had taken ? It wasn't fair ! A man could have two chances : ten. It didn't matter with them. Why was the world made like that ? Was it fair to expect a woman to wait for some one who might never come ? Rubbish ! Easy, plausible rubbish !

However could anything have been worth the mere chance ? If she had only known what love could be ! Of course Harry might become like the others, he might want her, but he wouldn't ever love her : and that was all she needed. Did one always have to pay for what one did ? Did they all ? The Necker Baby and the real ones, would they sometimes be ready to give back everything, just to start again, just to be pure, because at last they had learnt to love some one ? She had never thought of them as being capable of that kind of emotion. Perhaps they too "repented" sometimes. Was that what the Necker's defiance hid ? Yet was it repentance to want one's bonnet back, so that one might throw it over some new mill ?

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Oh, but she wanted to be good again, that kind comfortable nursery feeling. She wanted it more than she would ever want anything . . . and it could never happen : miracles didn't. If only God. . . . She would have prayed, but a sense of fancied fitness prevented her. One had to be careful what one asked God. But did he make one pay for everything always ? Did he set traps like this, to pay one out, to shame one, to show one how worthless one was, when he could just as well have made one splendid. She was soiled, horrid . . . horrid !

She narrowed her eyes and shuddered. It felt like having been beaten all over. She wanted to cry again, only it wouldn't do any good : she wanted to cry on Harry's shoulder and she mustn't. She hadn't lost all her self-respect. He'd despise her if she had. But, oh, how she wanted to. She'd been naughty and she wanted to be forgiven, to be good again. When one was a child why . . .

Harry liked her but he wouldn't ever love her. She wasn't the sort of girl a man would love. She was a soiled, stupid little creature. He only liked being with her because he was bored and because she wasn't bad looking. Soon he'd go away, and some day he'd love some one else. But she wouldn't : she loved him really, and one couldn't ever feel like this again. Even if people said so, it wasn't true. It was because they hadn't really loved at all, or were cynical and horrid. Perhaps one could have a patched-up, disillusioned sort of thing, but it couldn't be the same : it wouldn't be real, only a sort of makeshift, like a worn-out frock remodelled.

Lost : thrown away : all that mattered bartered for what didn't ! She hadn't known what life could be worth till now. And now her life must be wasted. Because . . . because she'd been a beast, a fool, a . . . !

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And while she was thinking of these things, Harry by her side was wondering why he had told her what he had never expected to tell anyone.

Funny thing ! It wasn't exactly his usual line, whining

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about these sort of things : and to a girl too ! Never told a soul about part of what he had told her : things that weren't anyone's business except his own : matters that only concerned one's own self-respect and that. It wasn't as if they were things one was likely to buck about either. He had talked to her about his mother too, and about Roddie. He had never somehow talked to anyone about Roddie before : not about what Roddie really meant to him.

But somehow she was different : she seemed really interested too, not just put on. Most women . . . that rotten little married woman at Poonah now ! And Letty Arkwright . . . and . . . but of course the other sort only cared for what they could get out of one : one couldn't blame them either. Not bad sorts by half, the Polls. Some extraordinary decent sorts amongst them . . . different of course, but . . .

Jolly lying in the sun. And a week ago he'd been arguing all day in bad German to those Serbian coves in that infernal airtight office of theirs. It all seemed a devil of a time ago . . . like the war almost . . . further away than some of that too . . . unimportant. What a tussle he had had with them too, and how infernally sulky that Colonel fellow got. What a game ! And it had seemed so important then. He worked at them and worried them, as if those worn out monitors had been his own.

How pretty Jill was. Usually if a girl had any looks, she was so infernally above herself that : . . . the ones that weren't anything out of the way got sour because nobody troubled about them much or else lay themselves out to kill, threw themselves at one, wriggled and gushed and that. A good many fellows took that fly. Hurh ! It didn't go down with him. Hurh !

There was such a lot of women who were jolly at first, for a day or two if they were English, or just an hour or two if they weren't. Like that Princess Zib . . . ? Zap . . . ? Zob . . . something or other . . . what the devil was her name . . . near Warsaw. She's seemed a real topper till

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one found out what she was after. But there was something damned disgusting when one found that sort in a . . . so infernally promiscuous, too : any sort of queer fish might go down with her : didn't matter in a man, though even with them they might sober down a bit after they were married. But with quite a decent sort for a husband, and while he was staying under the same roof and that . . . beurrh ! One didn't want a woman to be a saint. But one didn't want a girl of one's own class to be a sort of immoral doll, just a " whatnot " : some fellows might : just suit some of them. What one really wanted was . . .

Extraordinary thing how sensible Jill was too : one didn't have to explain things to her : she seemed to catch on to an idea one hadn't actually figured out oneself : must be extraordinarily sympathetic : knew when to say things and when not to. Not like that girl with the little blue Singer and the non-stop stockings his Aunt had raked out for him : a girl keeping on saying " Buck up, do " and " Look bright, old chap, for Christ's sake " wasn't what one wanted. Nor a girl of one's own class going to night clubs and dancing with the sort one saw there, letting dagos and actors and that brew muck her about most likely. Damn disgusting, that's what it was.

There was none of this " Let's have a binge," and, " turn the light out first for God's sake " and all this modern stuff about Jill. One knew how to treat her. None of the " heads I kiss you, tails I smack you " with her. What was it that insufferable young sweep of an attaché in Vienna with his twice-round bow tie and his eye glass on a ribbon used to say ? Something about treating all the tarts like ladies and all the ladies like tarts, 'cause both sorts liked it. Ten to one the young bounder was right. Just about what some of them would like. The sort that made one pity some poor devil who was their brother, and couldn't help it.

Now Jill : she wasn't stiff or stand-offish, but she was clean and decent. One knew where one was with her. Just the sort of girl one would like to spend the day with on the river : make an early start, take a canada . . . no, .

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a punt . . . no. The bend forward, the stroke, the jerky twist to keep her head straight : hadn't had a paddle in his hands since . . . God knows when. Not half such a bad sort of life. By Jove, no ! She was dressed just the part too, thin things and white shoes and that. Only wanted one of those big Japanese paper thing-a-me-jigs. Wouldn't she look ripping, punting : damn becoming to a girl, if she was any build. Wonder if she could. Looked topping when they reached up the pole and when they finished the half turn at the end of the stroke. How it all came back to one. One could spend a whole summer day like this and be as happy as . . . the very sort of weather too : and a quiet stretch of river : not too strenuous and not too much slacking. No particular time to have to be back by. There really hadn't been anything else that had seemed so worth while since " that time." One could loll about in a punt and forget all about those cursed things that had happened. The river couldn't be much spoilt, and a girl like Jill would make one forget anything. She wasn't the modern sort that rubbed one up the wrong way. She didn't make one feel as out of it as if one had gone to a village fair alone.

He shifted a little, so that he could see her face, and for a long while lay watching her. Four months before Major Gosling had admired her, on the night that he had arrived with the Embassy bags in Vienna. He had seen her only as she crossed the hall of the Bristol. Pretty little thing, he had thought, English obviously, and a lady, and had gone on with the consideration of the serious matters of food and lodging. She had altered very little since then, and the clothes she was wearing dated from that period. But Harry saw her very differently. He wasn't fifty and tired and hungry. He didn't see her passing through the hall of an ill-lit hotel, but on a Spring day with her profile clear against the softness of the distant sky, and with the sunlight and the wind playing hide-and-seek in her hair. Against the far-away blue her colour had just the tinge of peach blossom. Extraordinary how satisfying the irregularity of her nose was ; and

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the line of her neck, from her chin, out-thrust upon her hand to where it finished or merged . . . what did it do ? Lovely ! So nearly a straight line, yet with the difference that had a world of meaning in it. Some one ought to draw it, model it, fix it somehow . . . damnable he wasn't good enough for it himself : sort of loveliness, that would be gone the next moment and yet wasn't ever lost, somehow. That sort of thing didn't depend just on sex, like those Dutch dolls gone wrong that everybody seemed to like, Eves and that. A line like that was something one couldn't forget and yet would never be able to remember enough to draw it : that tantalizing, elusive loveliness. Made one think and understand . . . things one had read and never somehow . . . what was that about . . . "and launched a thousand gallees." Made one think of deep blue seas, ages ago . . . and argosies and purple islands and rosy-fingered dawn.

There must have been a devil of a lot in all that stuff, he hadn't understood then and had mostly forgotten now. A few rich, rounded words were all he could remember of it : that and the hot, dusty class-room with the flies one used to watch on the windowpane : and what they had been construing then, had been all about her : things that had happened ages and ages ago.

He wondered what she was thinking of. Odd, how little one knew what anyone thought about. Her eyelashes flickered faintly. How pretty she was ! Why the devil didn't all the girls leave their cheeks alone ? they seemed to think anything natural had got to be improved : putting paint and stuff as thick as treacle, or as a matter of that, like one puts "artificials" on land. A rum time and yet . . . wasn't even as if it was a new rage : they used to do it in the Bible and they hadn't stopped since. But Lord, how much prettier a girl like Jill was ! One didn't want a girl with a complexion that came off when she washed, it probably meant she didn't.

And if it hadn't been for taking old Hawkins' advice he wouldn't have stopped in Pest. Lord, how lucky he hadn't gone on to Vienna with the old man ! This was

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something worth being alive for : this weather and her. But she'd be the same in any weather. How jolly she would look in furs with snow and that about, or by moonlight on a lawn, or . . . steady !

There was a wistfulness and an air of innocence about her parted lips, that melted something in him. And the other day he had wanted to kiss her ! In broad daylight, just like . . . that time when he carried her across the stream. He would have, if he had known her a bit longer : only it seemed a bit unfair on her and one hadn't known how she would take it. He wouldn't have hurt her feelings for . . . good God, no. He had thought of stealing a kiss too : a bit rough ! One couldn't catch hold of anything as delicate as she was, and crush it. An overwhelming tenderness for her flooded him. Sweet little thing !

By God, there was something worth living for. His old valuations were tumbling down like card houses. Besides this the old ambitions seemed as futile now, as when one wanted one's " cap " at one's private school. And he had been so certain that what he had been aiming for had been all that was really worth while. Lord, what an ass ! He felt a pity for those poor blind fellows who were still pegging away, wasting their time . . . think of the heat on the Plains now ! And they might be . . . as free as he . . . No time to be back by . . . faint blue sky and the warm sun. No reason to go back till . . .

" Don't let's go back to dinner. Let's have it in that little place by the Tower," he said suddenly.

Neither of them had spoken for so long that, for a second or two the words had no meaning to Jill. Then she nodded. Dinner ! Bed time ! Another day . . . he would be gone soon ! Oh, it was too hard ! She bit her lip and turned her face away.

" I wonder what she's thinking of," he thought. One would think she was sad. She had been so happy before. How difficult it was to understand a girl.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Scent of the Acacia

ON the summit of the Janos Hegy there stands a tower, from which one can see far over the Great Plain and on clear evenings often to the lost mountains, that for thousands of years had been Hungarian soil. Perhaps in other lands this very view, which had made the restaurant at the foot of the tower, would afterwards have ruined it. But the Magyars meet life in another spirit: they regard it not with philosophy but curiously: they do not dodge its harder blows, nor pick and choose daintily amongst their emotions. They can lose themselves in pleasure and find peace in the utter abandonment to melancholy, which like tears brings consolation. They may deliberately draw close and peer over the brink of despair, but in the end they make a stepping-stone of it. For they are too virile to become resigned and, after all, it is only resignation that vanquishes.

So what was an excursion has become a pilgrimage, and the people of Budapest will still climb the Hunyadi Tower and take their children there, to catch a distant glimmer of the snowy Tatara and scan the furthest clouds for the dim shadow of the Transylvanian hills. Then when the sun has sunk and the lost mountains have faded, they go to the little house amongst the beech trees to drink their white wine and listen to the music of the *tziganes*.

That night, as the summer was not yet come, there were not more than half a dozen people in the restaurant, and Jill and Harry were able to dine at a table by the open windows. They were both ravenous, for they had eaten nothing since breakfast: so, when the food was brought they ate for a while in silence.



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The room was little more than a big hut. It was dimly lit and in the shadows, beams and stag-heads arched overhead. In a dark corner beside a huge dusty dresser three *tziganes* were playing. It was a place that the foreigner seldom came to and so the tunes they played were all national, ancient tunes that Jill knew already, composed centuries ago, when the Hungarians had been once before in servitude. The lament of them wailed under the rafters like echoes of an ancient grief.

The *jogas* was eaten and their glasses had been refilled, Jill looked across at Harry. He was watching her: so she smiled at him, but for a moment or two he did not respond. How stern he could look. If he had been a woman she would have been frightened of him. What made him look so hard to-night? Was he thinking about those years in Germany? She wished he would talk. They were intimate enough for silence not to be uncomfortable, ordinarily, but to-night she was on edge. She had been tantalizingly near to happiness, she had looked through the locked gates and afterwards she had passed through an ordeal of self-abasement. The first realization of her unworthiness had shamed her unbearably. She had nothing to say. What could she talk about? She could not think of anything, except that she loved him, that and the feeling of injury because inexperience had led her to a fatal and ruinous step. She could not make small talk when her heart was so full. She turned and gazed into the early night.

The restaurant stood on the very edge of the Janos Ridge: so that, looking from the open window, she seemed to be hanging over the steep beech-clad slopes which fell away in huge bounds towards the straggling outskirts of Buda. Far below in its rosy glow lay Pest and the sweeping curves of the river, so brightly lit that they seemed outlined in fire and that the lights elsewhere in the city showed feebly. Green and ruby lamps of the river craft threaded their way like glow-worms through the darkness. And, outlined against the vista of Pest, the ancient Var of Buda rose, like a city cut out of card-

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board, its palaces and churches clear against the luminance of the streets beyond.

Such a wonderful setting, the shadows of the restaurant vibrant with melody and outside the clean fragrance of the night! Wasted, all wasted! Because he did not love her. It wasn't any good. She had not waited and kept herself good for him and now it was all wasted and she had to taste the bitterness of her punishment. Out there was the fairyland she could never enter, just because she had done what she had been taught not to: because she had snatched at a short cut to security. Now she was an outcast. Shameful. She felt disgraced, as if she had been turned up and spanked before a room full of people. She could fancy her flesh tingling. Shamed! Oh, God, and how she loved him.

Those women at the other tables hadn't been fools and they had the right to love, which she had forfeited. Lost chances! No good now! And outside the fairyland that she could not enter! With an effort she tore herself away from the spell of the young night and brought her attention back to the meal. If only Harry would talk she wouldn't have to think. He ladled her glass full again with "bowle" from the big tureen on the table.

"Do give me some of the fruit?" she asked in grey tones. He fished her out some wild strawberries and pieces of peach and let them slip into her glass. Jill watched them sink and drained the glass in one big gulp. Better! When it was refilled, she raised it and sipped it this time, through closed lips. The rim of the glass pressed against her teeth, the sound of floating ice, clinking merrily, seemed to have grown immense, the gipsy music to come from a great distance. What a wonderful thing wine was! Gift of the Gods! Drinking this "bowle" was like drinking illusions. The wild strawberries were like the magic fruit of some Parnassus, full of jewelled inspiration. The blood was coursing warmly about her shoulders. She smoothed her hair.

Her self-confidence had begun to revive. He did like her and he was with her now. It wasn't any good moping.

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If he couldn't love her . . . there it was. She loved him : she always would : she had the right to do that. There wasn't any harm in loving him. But even if there was, she couldn't help it. Even when she grew old, and as thin and dry as a leaf, like Cousin Agatha, she would think of to-night. Nothing could take the remembrance of this from her : it was all her own. Now she would keep herself always for him : not because it would do any good, but because she loved him, always, for ever. Perhaps if there was a heaven . . .

It wasn't any good remembering that he would be gone soon : he was with her now. She must not waste happiness. This would be all that she would have to remember.

But why didn't he say something, instead of watching her. She wanted him to talk to her, wanted to listen to his deep tones. She shifted in her chair and tossed her head back. Her cheeks were flushed : a delicious recklessness was mastering her. She would be brave to-night. What did it matter ?

"What's the matter, Harry ?" she asked. "Are you bored ?"

That might make him talk : anyhow it broke the silence, which was what she wanted. She could direct the course of things : couldn't she ? That was why she was a woman.

"Good God, no," he answered. His fervency surprised her.

"What have you been thinking about all this time then ?"

He did not answer for a moment or two. She watched him with narrowed eyelids.

"You," he said.

There was no mistaking his earnestness : he was not bantering or chaffing. A wild hope flickered to sudden flame in her. She leant forward over the table, her chin in her hands. His elbows were on the table too. Their heads were so close that she could see the candle-light glittering in his eyes, and in them also her own reflection. What was the good of being cautious ? He couldn't be

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playing with her : that would be mean, beastly. He couldn't be doing that : he wasn't like that, ever.

He leant still nearer to her and she could see deep into his eyes, to a distance to where something gleamed and quivered, as if flickering under fathoms of water. They had never been so close to each other before : it was delicious. She caught her breath. His will seemed to caress her like a soft touch upon her shoulders.

Some force seemed to be bridging the gap between them, like one of those fierce snapping sparks. She was losing her touch of material things : her body was all that now held her back from him : and its power over her was weakening. She knew now what would happen. The present had faded away, with the material : she was standing on the threshold of a future as inevitable as the past. She had to ask him the question, whether she wanted to or not. It wasn't hypnotism : hypnotism belonged to a world of unforetellable realities, that was as faded now as an old photograph of someone long dead. It was fated that she should ask him. It was down in the book of words. She waited just a little longer, dallying for pure sensuous pleasure before swinging the balance. She looked down.

In a moment more she would have to speak. How thin his fingers were : their grip would be like a trap. They were joined now under his chin. She liked the muscularity of his throat. His mouth was as firm as ever, but the line of bitterness had gone. She would know the feel of his hands and his lips soon. She knew that, and now that it was assured she wanted to put off and save up the moment. She had never wanted to be held in any man's arms before, and the first desire often brings with it that balancing protective modesty, that is not coyness : that makes a woman deny herself to the very man she loves. To turn the glass again would be playing with love : the sands had nearly run through now. She must speak soon. She raised her glance to his eyes.

" Why were you thinking of me ? "

It was done now. She knew the answer : she knew

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what he would say : word for word like a text remembered from childhood. She caught the wail of the *tziganes'* music calling across the ages to the faithful : and then lost it again. His eyes were grappling with hers. Had the light grown dim ? The world was receding, leaving them together. He was going to say it. Then the words came.

"Because I love you."

She drew a long breath, as one does on a summer afternoon to inhale the overpowering fragrance of some flower, her breath almost ended in a sob. The words wrapped her about with a mantle, comforting, close as darkness, marvellously soothing. Her shame of life had gone altogether and a glow of well-being throbbed in her veins.

"Harry, darling," she whispered softly.

There wasn't any need for them to say anything more now. She withdrew her elbows a little and watched him. She could see the glint of teeth between his lips. She could feel his love like an arm about her. Somewhere in a far-away world the *tzigane* by her side was playing, for she caught again the echo of his music, lapping in the emptiness about her.

For a long time they sat watching each other. Outside the glamour of the night and their first kisses awaited them. Soon they would go, but she was glad he did not rise yet. She wanted to hold back a little longer : for the moment anticipation was enough. She had an instinct to handle love tenderly. Presently, all in good time, they would go out into the beech woods. She was glad he did not speak. There wasn't anything to say now . . . not yet. Love is not a thing of words.

Somewhere in the city far below, a clock struck. Harry called for his bill. Jill had never heard his voice so *gruff* before. While he settled it she looked round the room. At the next table were a young Jew and Jewess, ugly lovers with greedy faces. She wondered how they could want to kiss each other. She felt kindly towards them. Love must be about their only decent trait.

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How tall Harry looked now. She liked his way with waiters. She got up from the table and they passed through the further and darker room. The *tziganes* were bowing and smiling to them in the gloom.

On the threshold they waited for a second or two, looking into the night. The moon had risen and the world was full of milky light and solemn green shadows. The music of the *tziganes* went with them and the languorous scent of acacia bloom came to meet them, as they went over to the wood.

## CHAPTER X

### And the Stars Watch

**J**ILL was in her bedroom again, and with his kisses still warm on her lips, listened to Harry's footsteps retreating down the corridor. They were so typical of him, firm and certain but never heavy. Leaning back against the wall of the vestibule, she strained to catch the sounds till they were lost in the subdued throb of the hotel life. Till to-morrow!

He loved her! He loved her! It was more than she would have dared to pray for. For a while she remained motionless and inert, her shoulders against the cool paint-work, letting herself bask in the joy of this new knowledge. Physically she was tired out after the long day's trudging over the hills. Her head throbbed: her arms hung listlessly. She was utterly at peace now, consciously, deliciously content and thankful. Before, her love had been anxious, miserly, fierce and narrow as the beam of a searchlight in a dark, desperate world: now it was generous, all embracing. She loved him and the world he lived in: in the past, in the present, and the future: every one: nothing was vile any more: nothing could ever be altogether vile on an earth where there was love like this. Every one loved sometimes: they couldn't be bad then. Love was magical. There wasn't any one so drab that it could not make them wonderful. It was like the sunset that could glorify and suddenly transform some familiar and hideous thing, a factory, a slum.

The city must be full of people who loved. She was one of the thousand women, having this revelation. She would see every one differently now, the girls in the shops, the men in the trams: they would all be interesting:

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she would be able to understand them : no one would be machines any more, nor mere subjects for conjecture, nor background, like pebbles. It was the same as when one looked at a landscape : it depended which side the sun was, whether things were sad or gay. The world was good, and she had only just discovered it. She could never forget it now, or feel unkind again. She was marvellously happy.

She went into her bedroom and undressed herself mechanically. When she was ready for bed she switched out the light and threw open the French windows which led on to the narrow balcony.

The moon had ridden high in the empty sky. The night was calm and mysterious. The embankments were deserted : the trees along them were motionless : nothing stirred. She could hear no sound but the soft splash of the water against the quay. Below her the Duna rolled past, calm and effortless as time itself, a surface of unruffled silver. The river seemed as old as the moon itself : the city a mushroom growth of a single night.

She knelt down, and leaning against the bronze rail, buried her face in her elbow. The warm air itself slumbered : the murmur of the river was like a caress. Now that her eyes were closed she could feel his kisses on her cheeks, her lips, her forehead, the chaste fervent kisses of early love. For a while she hovered on the borderland of sleep.

How she loved him. This was the happiest hour she had ever known. She had not imagined that life could be so exquisite. Only a night or two before she had knelt weeping on her bed, because she did not believe that any one could love her. She had thought herself utterly debased, a failure, finished except for degradation.

She had not dared even to ask God to help her but He had, unexpectedly, wonderfully : just when she had despaired altogether. God had cared for her. She had thought He could not care for people who had been wicked, and wicked again and who only asked for things when they were sad and frightened, and who forgot all about



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Him when things went well. But it had been true all the time. He had forgiven her, in spite of everything, just because she was sorry, and because He understood everything and knew what had driven her to what she had done. Perhaps, knowing everything, He hadn't even been very angry. She fancied a very human God, old and benign, as in the creations of early Renaissance art. The God of her childhood had been like that and He had not altered, only faded.

There had been also a Christ, a little child not yet powerful and a Holy Ghost, an uncertain, moody being, silent and probably a little sinister, in the shadow behind the Throne, a sort of minister without portfolio. When God had been cross with her, she had always suspected that it was really the Holy Ghost. She had fancied Him the unruly member of the Trinity, getting angry and breaking things, and being remonstrated with and finally pacified by the benign Father. God had been most vivid to her when He had been most incredible. Since those days she had not doubted, only she had forgotten a little: the conception of Him had not grown with her.

One's friends would not forgive one like that: one's mother would not. Her mother had not forgiven gracefully: luckily she soon forgot. Jill was not sure that even Kitty would forgive like that. But He had. He had brought her Harry and let Harry love her.

She was overwhelmed by His mercifulness. She had no pride of intellect to keep her from Him. She would never forget Him again, never, never: she would say her prayers every night, like she used to at school. In the War Office days and in Vienna she had only prayed on rare occasions and in her new life at the Ritz she had not cared to at all, even when she had been very unhappy. She had strayed so far, that God had become remote, vaguely angry with her.

Still leaning on the balustrade, she gazed up into the high sky, where the moon had climbed. Beyond it were thousands and thousands of worlds: and yet He had

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time to think of her and make her happy. With her chin resting on her arms she began to pray softly.

"Thank you . . . thank you, always, always, thank you. Thank you for Harry . . . thank you for making him: thank you that I can love. . . ." Perhaps if Harry had come later she might not have been able to love.

"Thank you for letting me love him," she went on just above a whisper. "I've been dreadfully, dreadfully naughty. I was frightened and didn't think enough: but I've been so sorry, oh, so wretched. But now I'm happy, absolutely happy. You'll never let me lose Harry, will you? Keep him for me: make me good for him: make me always kind to him and make him happy. Let me help him, take care of him."

And gazing into the depths of the sky, she remembered for some reason, those days before the war when they had all been at home: the flags by the pond in the old orchard, Nero, the goat, her father and her mother, Kitty and Janet. It had been a long time since she had cared to think about her father. She had been very fond of him and he still seemed more real to her than her mother: her mother who was always full of some new craze and forgetting everything else. She was like a hen who seldom remembered her chicks. No, her mother was only a stranger now, not even a friend: for one could not tell her things: only a stranger, in whose doings one felt a fondly tolerant interest. Her mother had never really been interested in one, only in whether one wore warm enough clothes and if one really had a sensible lunch and not . . . only buns and sweets. Being interested only in material things made a person so unreal: a person who was only practical got to be more of a tradition than a human being. Her mother! She hoped the tomato farm would be a success. God take care of her and of Janet.

She scarcely ever thought of Janet now. She wondered if she was happy, with that war-time husband of hers. It was Kitty whom she loved best of the family. Dear, dear Kitty, who would do anything in all the world for

## Sweet Pepper

her . . . except forgive her. She prayed long and fervently for Kitty.

"Make her happy. Find work for her. Let her love some one like me, and be loved."

And poor old General Hawkins. He was such a lonely old thing, with only his dog and his work to care about. She was glad he liked Harry. And Tibor Arkozi, who had been so kind to her really : he had been a dear to her. It wasn't disloyal to Harry to pray for him, because she had never loved him or thought about him in that way. What could she pray for him? Not happiness, for he was always happy till he grew suddenly tired of happiness itself and had to go out upon some quest. She did not think he even cared much about happiness. She would not wish him to be happy always, because happiness was only a resting time for him. It wasn't unfaithful to Harry to think about him or the past . . . now. She would never see him again, and she never would have, even if she had not met Harry. He must be up there in the North now, sitting by a camp fire, perhaps watching the same moon and thinking of the lights and music of Pest. God help him and his Hungary!

And Glory who had been so kind to her and who wasn't really cynical and hard underneath. And the "Musket-eers," who had been nice to her and poor, naughty old Csaradah, who would have been such a fine gentleman if only . . . she couldn't explain : God would understand. Poor old Csaradah!

"And always for Harry. Thank you . . . thank you for Harry . . . thank you for Harry."

## CHAPTER XI

### Echoes from England

**A**S if in answer to her prayers overnight, Jill found on her breakfast tray a letter from Kitty. She did not open it at once, but while she sipped her coffee watched the blue envelope, determining that it should bring good news. It must. She had not heard from Kitty for weeks. To hear from her now must mean better tidings. She had prayed so hard for her the night before, that if the letter did not bring good news, her rediscovered trust would be shaken. It could not be bad news : it must not be. She was so happy this morning. The sunlight poured across her bed : the birds were singing in the little garden between the hotel and the Szechenyi Bridge. Such a fine world ! It must be good news. Nevertheless, while she opened the letter with deliberate care, her heart was beating faster than usual. Before she began to read it she forced herself to light a cigarette. She must not let herself be a fool.

“DEAREST LITTLE SISTER,—

“How are you ? You haven’t written for ages and ages. Is the new job a nice one ? You never answered my questions or told me what it was. I suppose it must be with some English or American people, otherwise in a country where you say every one is so poor, you would not be making good wages. Do scribble me a few lines, darlingest, and tell me what you’re doing. I’ve felt quite neglected, but I know you’ve been too busy to have had time to write.

“I’ve got a new job at last. Such an unexpected one and in such an unexpected way. The other afternoon

## Sweet Pepper

I'd been to see after some place I'd seen advertised in Oxford Street. I hadn't seen the advertisement till the afternoon, so of course it had been taken in the morning. The man I saw about it had been bothered with people coming all afternoon, for he snapped my head off: 'Filled this morning—thanks for applying—good-day,' all in one breath. Coming back along Oxford Street I saw the sweetest hat in Marshall's, absurdly cheap too. If I'd got a job I'd have bought it . . . because I haven't got a single new thing since the July sales, and I'm really getting too shabby to look at. I don't know what you'd say. But I didn't dare to spend a penny more than was absolutely necessary, so I just swallowed wanting it and went on.

"I really didn't notice which way I was walking home, for I was feeling so glum, till I noticed I was just outside Aunt Mary's. It was about tea-time, and I thought I'd go in. As a matter of fact, when I found I was outside her front door, I thought I could cadge a free meal there. I didn't see really why I shouldn't, and I hadn't had any lunch and as I hadn't been near her for two months I didn't see how she could object if I turned up like that. So I dropped in. There was a Mrs. Bathurst there. I don't know if you know her, but I've met her there before. I suppose she knew I earned my living, for she asked me half way through tea if I knew any one who'd run a girls' club she was interested in in Vauxhall.

"She didn't know I was out of work. She couldn't have, because Aunt Mary didn't. She always thinks one's trying to sponge on her if one tells her when things go wrong. Of course I jumped at the chance. It must have been a bit rough on Mrs. Bathurst, because she couldn't tell me I wasn't a bit what she was looking for, but I couldn't afford to be too nice about it. Anyhow I don't suppose it much mattered to her. As a matter of fact I do really think she was pleased. The last manager woman had cleared off at a minute's notice, and had left everything in an awful mess. No one could make anything of the accounts, and as she'd chosen her herself, she

## Echoes from England

wanted to get things straightened out and make anything good. She wanted some one not too young, because the girls got a bit out of hand sometimes, and not too old, because it's important to have some one they find sympathetic. Then she wanted some one whom they'd think was grander than any one they came across so they couldn't try any games on.

"She really jumped at me as quickly as I jumped at her. She ended by asking me to dinner to talk things over. Will you believe it, as soon as she'd cleared off, Aunt Mary let go at me for having come cadging work off her friends in her drawing-room and making her an excuse, her this, her that. You know how detestably possessive she can be. She said the most beastly things and capped everything by saying that, of course if she'd known I was out of 'employment' down her nose, with her eyes on her shoe buckles, she could have found me a 'suitable situation' at once. It was so easy when one knew the 'right people,' she said.

"However I couldn't afford to fight with her, and it wouldn't have been fair to the rest of you, so I swallowed it all and went off and bought myself the hat at Marshall's to make up and because I thought I could afford it now.

"I dined alone with Mrs. Bathhurst. Such a nice house with a drawing-room full of Lowestoft china, like Aunt Mary's, only much better. I expect that's why Aunt Mary was angry with her for helping me. We had a most delicious dinner. Trout and wild duck with a most wonderful salad full of pineapple and every sort of fruit. I hadn't had lunch you remember, and I hadn't been able to get much at Aunt Mary's and I was ravenous. Mrs. Bathhurst was a perfect dear and kept pressing me to eat twice at everything, because she was very proud of her cook, she said, but I really believe it was because she understood. I hadn't had such a good dinner since old Bamfy took me out before Christmas. Everything was fixed up and I take up my duties, which seem very various, on Monday. I live in and have two rooms all to myself. I have to play with the girls and pump them a good deal

## Sweet Pepper

and keep a sort of log about each of them. I get £100 a year and all found. There's a library. It sounds as if it will be rather nice and I much prefer having to do with people than with books and figures.

"Mrs. Bathhurst wants me to teach the girls dancing when none of the voluntary workers turn up on dance nights. I like Mrs. Bathhurst, who seems to run the thing chiefly herself.

"Darlingest, I'm so happy about it. I'd been getting really rather down and didn't care what happened.

"I saw Janet the other night. She had the most awful coloured dress and hat on, like a poster of a musical comedy. Her young man had given it to her. Of course I had to say I liked it. She sent you her love. I think she's pretty happy.

"I heard from Mum last week. She told me how many seedlings had been pricked out and what per cent. of seed had germinated. Of course I forgot all about it. She's invented some new way of watering that she is very gone on. I don't think she said anything that really mattered.

"The new clothes don't seem very pretty this year. The people in Bond Street look commoner and richer than ever. Don't be a little pig person, but write to me a long letter with all your news. Now do! My very very best love, littlest sister.

"KITTY."

## CHAPTER XII

### Other People's Troubles

**E**VERYTHING in the world was wonderful now : Harry loved her and Kitty was settled in a safe berth again. How splendid Kitty had been : she hadn't funk'd, as she had. Kitty had won through, as Kitty always would.

Warm sunlight flooded the room. She wished to be out of doors on such a morning : she dressed quickly and left her room. Harry would be waiting for her in the hall. She was shy of meeting him again in the broad daylight. How would he look at her after their kisses ? Strangely, perhaps, her modesty had diminished little during these past few months. In some secret way she had been able to keep it largely drugged. That she had never loved, and therefore her surrender had never been more than physical, may have helped her in this. Some women may give themselves in a kiss, and yet may withhold themselves through years of marriage. Modesty is mental and not physical, or in the jargon of to-day, subconscious and not conscious. Her previous experiences had meant nothing to her inward self : but Harry was different. Harry had woken in her that of which modesty is the protection.

The little peasant-girl in the green dress was washing the marble stairway. She smiled up at Jill as she passed. Once Jill had envied her. A dear little thing ! She stopped and gave her a note, though it was not time for her fortnightly tip. The girl's eyes sparkled, she was happy too. A changed world ! A wonderful world !

Harry had been watching the curtains on the stairs and rose as she passed them. He was in white flannels. As



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she moved along the terrace of the hall the ghost of a smile flickered on his lips. She was glad he waited for her like that. She did not like men who strolled up to one, so like cinema cowboys, that one was frightened they would crush one's hand. Did any one, except kitchenmaids, really love the strong silent man. Soldiers were often casual and off-hand : Harry was just perfect.

" Good-morning, little one," he said.

The hall was empty and they were standing close together. How silly it was that he could not take her in his arms and kiss her. For a moment or two they stood silent, watching each other. Her hand resting on the table was close to his. He stroked it softly.

" How are you, little one ? "

Jill nodded.

" Not sorry ? "

" Harry ! "

He smiled at her and picked up his straw hat from a chair. How nice a hard straw hat looked : she was tired of those floppy felt things.

" Where would you like to go this morning, little one ? I thought I'd hire a car this afternoon and we could go for a drive."

" Oh, Harry, what fun. Let's. We can lunch early and start early. I don't mind where we go this morning. Have you any plans ? "

She did not mind what they did, as long as she was with him. What could anything else matter ?

" I've been meaning to get a good camera on the cheap for a long time, and as a matter of fact, the hall porter's put me on to a place where they have sales of every sort of thing each week. I think if you don't mind we might go and see what they've got there. Make an excuse for a walk anyhow, wouldn't it ?

They went out into the bright sunlight and for a time walked along the Embankment. The river was gay with little golden waves, under the further bank the pert little French *chasseur* was dressed with flags, all far too big for her. Harry wanted to know whether the " Frogs " had

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got a *fête* or beano of some sort on, or if it was only to air the bunting, or just a bit of a crow to show they were there. How funny men were, Jill thought : funny, but splendid. They did not get absorbed in one thing to the exclusion of everything else. She could not think of anything now, except about him and how she loved him. But Harry had a big mind : he could be in love with her and go on noticing and wondering about things. That was why men succeeded. She felt very conscious of their sex superiority. How clever Harry was.

They walked a long way before they found the place where the sales were held, within the morgue-like courtyard of some giant public building, a university or some such institution. Harry bought a Hungarian and German catalogue and they entered a big hall, full to the ceiling with a great quantity and diversity of objects, furniture, pictures, embroidery, books, plate, jewellery, glass, clothes, telescopes, lamps, cases of bird's eggs, lathes, stamp albums. They drifted through the rooms, Harry looking for cameras, Jill watching him. Several times he stopped and examined some photographic or mechanical instrument. Jill watched lovingly and intelligently. They were just like school-boys, men : so serious about things that did not really matter, finding their happiness in them. Cog wheels and lenses were not life, and yet the sort of men who noticed everything and saw the drama of life were not the fine fellows like Harry : they were introspective creatures, usually a little degenerate. Harry examined a lathe, explained its works to Jill and passed on to a rifle. Every now and again he consulted the catalogue.

"It seems this sale is a Government affair and they don't make a commission or charges. It's to sell the belongings of people who've been ruined by the war. They have these shows every week, and in the notice here it advises the poor devils who've got things to sell to remember the number of others there are in the same boat and to give notice weeks before."

He turned over the pages of an album of war snapshots.

"I'm sorry I read the infernal preface," he went on.

## Sweet Pepper

"Sort of puts one off. It's like living on the cheap valuta. Bosche Land is full of English doing it. Seems so damn mean, hating the blasted Bosche and then living with them. But you can't blame people, when one thinks how hard hit our people have been, all bar the working man, skinned with taxes and that. They've suffered worse than the other nations that way. Besides, of course, spending money in a country helps it really. But it's put me off my camera."

They wandered about looking at huge rolls of strange carpets and rugs.

"Seems so damnable just because we've come out on top, bouncing in and buying up the camera of some decent old professor or some one. Probably he thought such a hell of a lot of it, and fiddled and fussed over it all day when it was new. Like robbing the poor devil when he's down. Of course he's got to sell and if some one buys they're doing him a good turn really. If I was a Rockefeller or one of those millionaire Johnnies, I'd like to come here and buy up the whole place and give the things back to their owners. Funny none of the millionaires ever do anything one can see in the way of charity: only give a cheque to some frowsy old society or contraption like that. There'd be some satisfaction in doing a thing like this: giving some poor old general back his blessed family relics and his old swords and his sideboard. Some point in a thing like that, seeing the old boy beaming, and that. I wish . . ."

Jill nodded and smiled. "It would be splendid if one could do it," she said.

"One wouldn't have to be so devilish rich either. The reserve seems to be next to nothing: a few "thou" and you could buy the whole blessed show. But I suppose if one did start, some damned *schieber* would chip in and raise the market against one. That's the worst of it: whatever one does out here half the help one gives goes into the pockets of the Jews."

Jill, watching him, had thought that she loved him most when he grew enthusiastic. At other times he was a little

## Other People's Troubles

reserved, or only spoke a sentence or two at a time. She thought that he had broken himself into a habit of stoicism years ago : " that time " in Germany must have forced him to curb his feelings. He was surveying an *art nouveau* dining suite very contemptuously.

" They call *art nouveau*, *art juif*," Jill told him.

" Damned ugly," he said, " yet I suppose some poor beggar was fond of it, and was as proud as Punch when he bought it."

He was really much kinder to others than to himself, she thought, but he did not seem to have ever wasted much pity on himself during those years. He had only been angry when he failed to escape from captivity. How brave he had been. And now he was quite upset, because he had seen all these treasured household gods for sale. Men were funny : they could not imagine things : they had to see things, to have them brought home to them. Harry had known how this whole country had been bled white by the war, drained by the Bolsheviks and finally pilfered by the Roumanian Army in peace time : yet he had not realized what it must have meant. Perhaps that was why men wanted wars : perhaps that was why they were brave. They could not imagine things till they happened. How different they were in the way they loved, too : they could . . . what was it Glory used to say about them ? oh, yes. " Men could fix their feelings to the hitching post outside a saloon and go in and have a highball." Women could not forget their emotions and leave them until they wanted them. Harry was thinking about cameras and philanthropy and all sorts of things : and she had only been thinking about him. But she did not want him different : she loved him just as he was : because he was what he was.

" Let's get out of this, little one. It makes you feel rotten," he said.

It would have been difficult not to have felt some sympathy for the ruined owners of this jumble of treasures and trash. By the doorway a crafty group of *la race* was pawing trinkets and appraising them.

## CHAPTER XIII

### When the Gorse is in Bloom

**I**N the afternoon they motored into the country in a hired landaulette. The Hungarian spring was already far advanced, the sun was very hot and the fields were dazzling with wild flowers. Jill and Harry with their hands locked, lay back in the corners of the car, watching each other. For her there was no need of words : it was enough to be with him : she did not even want to think.

"Extraordinary thing I ever met you, you know, little one," he said.

"Yes darling ?"

"I got so sick of the job I had trying to make those Serb Johnnies carry out what they'd signed on to do, and to make them even pretend not to be savages, that I all but chucked up the infernal business and went straight home. Teaching foxes to guard poultry wasn't my *métier* : I saw that. I should have cleared out, only old 'Enry 'Awkins was so damnation persuasive, that to please the old boy I said I would do what he wanted and take a fortnight's holiday here before I made up my mind to bung in my papers. Funny ! It was just a toss up whether I did or not. God's aunt ! I'm thankful I humoured the old boy. Shows one gets rewarded sometimes."

Jill squeezed his hand and for a while they were silent again. This was like heaven. Being with him and being borne through the soft air, hot as summer in England yet with all the freshness of spring. Presently with the insatiable greed of lovers she assailed him.

"Are you very very glad you stayed here, Harry ?"

## When the Gorse is in Bloom

"Little owl! A very sweet little owl . . . a very . . ."

He drew her to him and she leant against him, her head upon his shoulder, his arm about her.

"Do you know little one that when I came out to Mitel-Europe, I thought life was over for me: instead of only just beginning. I really only came out at all because I didn't think I'd ever be happy again. Once I'd seen how things were for me soldiering. . . . You know all that time in Germany I somehow thought I'd be able to pick up things, just where I'd left off. But it didn't take long to find out . . . they behaved quite decent to me, gave me all the seniority I'd have had and that. But it wasn't any good. I took it awful bad: not to show, I mean, but inside. Just knocked the bottom out of my fish kettle."

"Poor old Harry."

Jill, leaning against him could feel his deep tones as well as hear them. The sensation thrilled her curiously. She snuggled closer. He would go on soon. What a wonderful world, more beautiful than she had ever fancied. Harry had been sent to save her, just when she had been staring over the edge of utter despair, when everything had gone black. This happiness was a revelation.

Always before, there had been in her character a strain of melancholy, as elusive as that which haunts the silent hours of Springtime: now she was perfectly, absolutely happy: her doubts were at rest. Only that morning she had wondered whether she ought to tell Harry about . . . But it had been silly . . . ungrateful, really. God would not have sent him to her, if he had not been meant for her. It would be inconceivable that he should have been sent just to show her what she had lost. God was good: very, very good. She was absolutely at peace now.

"I thought that as the Army wasn't any good to me any more I might have a try at having a good time: but you know about that, too. I found I'd been neaped: the tide had gone out while I'd been out there those years, and I was stranded high and dry: a sort of bally Rip van Winkle.

## Sweet Pepper .

"Somehow that was the nastiest knock of the two really. I've heard poor old devils say the same thing. They'd sweltered in some God-forsaken part of the world, pegging away for years and thinking they were saving up their pleasures till later. Then afterwards, when they got home, they found all their friends had drifted off, or settled down into family men and that, and they'd lost their own taste for enjoying things even. The Service Clubs are full of them. If you'll let 'em they'll tell you all about it: makes one feel prickly and uncomfortable all over somehow, because you know the poor beggars are half ashamed of grouching about it to you. I felt like that: high and dry. So I cut it all and came out here. It's like dodging back again to the good old pre-war days coming out here. Seemed rum, just when I'd got enough money to do things I'd always been meaning to."

Jill turned, looked at him and smiled.

"Happier now, darling?"

He bent over her and kissed her eyes. The jolting of the car threw her against him, and his moustache was harsh and wiry against her skin. How she loved him! . . . and how funny men were. She only grumbled because she wanted things, but they grumbled about things that were over and set right. "Having a good old buck, or having a good old grouse" with some one of his own way of thinking had been General Hawkins's idea of a well-spent evening.

"Then I got so fed up watching the mess the wise men of the West had made of things out here, that I thought of breaking off again and trying big game as a last resort; though I haven't much use for it. Rum thing! I felt directly I got into the hotel that something jolly was going to happen. I'm not a bit that way, premonitions and that, I mean: but I did. Just an odd chance that I found you: just luck."

"What did you think of me when we first met?" she asked.

He laughed: the sound came from somewhere deep

## When the Gorse is in Bloom

down in him : just the laugh a man ought to have, Jill thought.

"Well to tell the truth, I thought what an infernal nuisance getting to know any one. I thought I'd be let in for a series of bun fights and being taken round and that, just when I wanted a quiet time to myself. Funny !"

"When did you begin to care, Harry ?"

"I dunno. It came. At first I thought I was only being a fool. I'd made a fool of myself years ago in India with the wife of a judge : and another time . . . at home . . . I was . . . It's absurd now . . . You see you weren't one of these modern young women who take one's breath away, so I liked you directly you started. I thought you awfully pretty and that. Then I began to care and . . . as a matter of fact I tried to stop it. Thought it would only be a disappointment : that it was because I hadn't seen any women for weeks and that. Then I found I couldn't clear out, which I'd meant to do if I got it too badly. Then . . ."

She knew he was going to kiss her again and she turned her face slowly up to his.

"Go on. I do like hearing, Harry."

"Do you remember that time I carried you over that soft bit ? Yes, well I wanted to kiss you so much I hardly knew how to stop myself. But somehow."

"I knew you wanted," Jill said and hid her face in the depths of his fleecy coat.

"Did you, by Jove ?" He looked down at the soft fair hair that was all he could see of her. Extraordinary creatures ! How the devil could she have . . . Extraordinary ! The more one thought of it the more . . . by Jove yes . . . perhaps . . . you never could tell. He became lost in amazement at the subtlety of her sex, while Jill was trying to listen to see if she could hear the beating of his heart. Each had found in the other revelation, and contentment in their discoveries.



## CHAPTER XIV

### Soft Music—Off

TWO nights later they went to the Opera together. The hall porter of the Ritz had got them a good box on the first tier near the stage.

That night Jill ventured to wear a less simple dress than any in which Harry had seen her. It was a short frock of oyster-coloured *crêpe de chine* with a train of white and gold brocade lined with a soft cigar-coloured material. Luckily the *décolletage* was very modest. When Harry had met her in the hall, he had looked her up and down and for a moment she had been frightened that he thought her overdressed. Actually he did not appreciate that this gown was of a vastly different genre from the girlish evening frocks of hers which he knew.

"I say you look topping. That . . ." He struggled for some appropriate word, that "what-did-they-call-it" was beautiful stuff. So she need not have really been so careful before. How funny men were: they noticed, only they did not understand.

Jill had not been to the Opera for a long while and was very happy and excited.

She was glad that Harry was in evening dress. Most of the English only wore dinner jackets or sometimes did not trouble to dress at all. Jill had learnt a severe code of male dress from General Hawkins, who was himself always starched and stiff, in a fashion of usually fifteen years before. He was greatly concerned about keeping up his nation's prestige.

"Gotta look clean," he used to say, "not er tricked up like actors and poodle-fakers, but clean: damn it anybody can look clean. Foreigners 'spect us to show

## Soft Music—Off

'em what's what. When yer thinks of it it's dressing for dinner on a desert island that helps stop yer from goin' soft, eh ? ”

The performance that night was in aid of the refugees, chiefly ex-state-employees from the lost territories, who were living in railway wagons outside Budapest. Every one who had been able to come was there. Admiral Horthy, the Regent, in naval uniform was in the central box : two of the young Archdukes were near the stage : Count Appouyi, the grand old man of Hungarian diplomacy, just back from Paris : obviously he was depressed to-night, almost broken : he looked like a sick eagle. Istvan Rackovszky, president of the Parliament and hero of a score of political duels, was there with his vivid daughter. There were many others of the Hungarian aristocracy, some of whom Jill knew by sight. Andrassys, Batthyany, Esterhazy, Bethlen and Count Teleki, the Prime Minister.

The leaders of the *demi-monde* were there too.

Jill shivered. What she had escaped. Now she need not think about any of that any more. Harry was talking to her.

“ I haven't been to the Opera for years,” he was saying.

Jill had not been since the last time when Prince Palugay had taken her : that seemed years ago, in a different existence.

Il Pagliacci had sung down his tragic curtain, the occupants of the boxes had commenced their general post, a young Archduke had found his way to the Regent's box and sat at the Admiral's side whispering to him.

“ Come on,” Harry said. “ If they aren't ever going to start this show again we may as well have a look outside.”

They went out on to the magnificent stairs, which were thronged with people. Major Zonay, straight-backed and more stern than ever, bowed to Jill.

“ That's the man we saw jumping the other day. Do you remember ? ” she asked.

“ Shouldn't forget him in a hurry,” Harry replied.

## Sweet Pepper

"Damn smart rig that of his. Hussar I suppose? Well built fellow, isn't he?"

The "Microbe," dapper and minute, was descending the stairway, talking in his rather un-Hungarian way with hands and shoulders, to some over-smart women. He often designed scenery and settings for the ballet: for he was extremely artistic and held some position on the directorate. When he saw Jill he bustled up to her, and with a "*Permettez*" to Harry, began to tell her things of the other "Musketeers" and to extol the virtues of the ballet which was to follow: till Jill, frightened of his saying something indiscreet, succeeded in shaking him off.

When they returned to their box, the audience was in shadow and the ballet had begun. Harry, without sitting near to her, was able to hold her hand unobserved. She remembered how this ballet had thrilled her when she had seen it before. She had liked it better than the Russians. It borrowed nothing from the Orient or the nursery: it was as delicate as "*Les Sylphides*" but not as emasculated: as beautiful as "*Le Spectre de la Rose*," without loaning anything from the association of lavender and faded petals. She liked it even better than "*L'Après-midi d'un Faune*," which always abashed her a little.

To-night it was more perfect than ever, but that vague "sense of tears, inherent in all transitory loveliness," could not affect her when Harry was by her side. It was all perfect. She did not want the curtain ever to fall, and yet when it did, she would be in the closed car with Harry, and his arm about her and his lips warm upon her neck. She caught her breath. Life was marvellous.

## CHAPTER XV

### Naval Intelligence

**I**T was four days after the night at the Opera that Harry was very late for lunch. Jill had been waiting for nearly half an hour in the hall of the hotel when he arrived. He apologized shortly and they went into the restaurant. She could tell by his voice that he was angry.

For some time he did not speak but glared at the *carte*, and then gave his order testily to the waiter. Jill launched various subjects, without attracting more than a grudging attention from him.

"What's the matter, Harry darling?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Jill let this pass and began telling him about a letter she had had from her mother that morning. All through lunch his ill-humour lasted and, by the time they were drinking coffee in the drawing-room, Jill had become thoroughly depressed herself. He had never been difficult before. What could it be about?

"Harry," she said.

He looked up slowly. She could tell from the unusual narrowing of his eyelids that he was still angry.

"Harry, what is it?"

• "Nothing much: nothing important."

"Why don't you tell me?"

• "I'd really rather not. It isn't anything important."

"Tell me. I want to know," she coaxed.

"Only a row I had with one of those sailor fellows on the Danube Commission."

"What on earth about?"

"Nothing."

"Harry, why can't you tell me?"

## Sweet Pepper

"I'd really much sooner not. I would really."

"Harry!"

"Well if you must know, it was like this. I'd much sooner not tell you, mind you. I was a bit tired after our golf this morning and I went down to the bar to get a cocktail. There was no one there except this sailor fellow. I've seen him there before. He was a bit "on": he usually seems to be. I'd spoken to him before, but I didn't suppose he'd know who I was. I shouldn't have known him, if it hadn't have been for his uniform.

He's a big hulk of a fellow with red hair and pop eyes: looks dazed most of the time: perhaps he isn't "on" as much as he seems. Well he got talking to me: offering drinks and that. He'd been on T.B.D.'s and small craft all the war, and was pretty hard on the fellows who hadn't. He hadn't spent his time lying in Scapa Fell and "dusting the Grand Fleet," he said. A trifle thick that. He was a bit of a buck-stick, anyhow.

"Then he said something about you. I may as well tell you, only it's only fair to remember the chap was a bit "buffed."

"Nice little bits of goods you've brought up alongside," he said.

Jill gasped: a horrible fear chilled her. What did the sailor know about her? What had he said? She sat still, as if frozen, waiting for a blow to follow.

"I didn't look exactly cordial," Harry went on, "but I didn't say anything. Sailors are a very decent lot, and if one of them does drink a bit more than is good for him and plays the goat sometimes, one's got to remember the hell of a life they have, cooped up with a lot of other fellows, till they could cut each other's throats."

Jill bit her lip and waited. Why wouldn't he put her out of her suspense?

"I'd just finished my drink and was clearing off when he said, "When you've finished with her you might hand her over to me."

Jill flinched and braced herself. Was there more to follow?

## Naval Intelligence

"I was half way to the door, but I spun round on him, pretty sharply. He saw he'd overstepped it a bit that time and got on the "no offence" business. I wasn't to get "shirty." He'd only meant he liked my taste in fluff, and that kind of talk. He was a bit thick in the voice and that. If he hadn't been in uniform and . . . well a dozen other things . . . But I wasn't going to take that kind of thing lying down all the same, so I went up to him pretty close and did the heavy with him and told him. I said, 'Let me tell you one thing. The girl you've been talking about is the one I'm going to marry.' That knocked the stuffing out of him a bit : he dropped his jaw and looked at me like a fish at the side of a tank. I bet he hadn't pulled himself together by the time I got upstairs."

Jill breathed again. That was all ! She would not have endured the suspense again for a fortune. It had shaken her horribly. She smoked on in silence. Saved ! Just by mere good luck ! If the sailor had been a shade drunker he might have ruined her. For a moment she had forgotten that she loved Harry, had forgotten everything except fear.

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Easy Answer

**J**ILL lay very still, her head on Harry's shoulder. There was no moon and in the wood it was very dark: nothing stirred. His arm was round her.

"Are you worrying about anything, little one?" he asked. Neither of them had spoken for a long while. Jill shook her head. She did not want to talk. She was lost in the darkness and in his arms: time for her had ceased: she would not let herself think. What Harry had said to her at lunch had left her vaguely uneasy. Perhaps . . .

"I believe you are, sweet one," he reproached her. She shook her head again.

For a long time he was silent, wondering. What could it be? Had he been a fool or a brute to tell her what that ass of a sailor had said? Women were difficult to understand. He had been clumsy! Damn it! Why hadn't he kept it to himself.

"Has my telling you what that fellow said this morning upset you? Umm?"

"No darling," she breathed in a whisper. Why would he try to bring her back to the world with its ugliness and stresses: she wanted to float on for ever and ever in this still darkness, forgetful of past and future.

He shifted his head a little so that he could see her. In the dimness her face seemed pale and mysterious: a faint reflected light glowed in her eyes. He loved her marvellously, with a tenderness that held passion as yet at bay. He had never believed himself capable of such strength of emotion. What would Roddie have thought

## The Easy Answer

of him? He wondered if Roddie knew. No one would ever be able to tell that: that was beyond knowledge. Yet one could not tell. A month ago he would never have believed that he could care for any one like this: he had fancied life a tunnel between birth and death, with work and pleasure and pain as incidents in the passage through it, all mechanical and physical, all as material and as explicable as arithmetic. Then love had come and blasted the whole fabric of his belief. One could not tell. Life was something different from what he had thought, incredibly finer, wider. It was as if he had lived for years in a cellar and had suddenly emerged into the sunlight.

If he had gone on to Vienna, as he had meant to, he would never have met her: if it had not been for that wonderful fluke of luck, he wouldn't have known. By Jove, he ought to be thankful. He must always be thinking how to make her happy: he must not plan his own life and just drag her along with him. As it was, what a fool he had been. He had taken it all for granted. If it hadn't been for that blighter in the bar that morning he might have gone on like this for weeks, without thinking of asking her to marry him. He had somehow taken it for granted: taken it as fixed up. It had been damn thoughtless of him. Very likely she had been worried about it, poor sweet little girl. How was she to know he was straight? How the devil should she, indeed? Lots of men are such damn swine to women. Poor little thing! He must take care of her. There she had been worrying about the future, and he . . . curse it all. He ought to have known.

"Little girl," he began, to make her listen.

How deep his voice sounded. Jill nodded against his shoulder.

"I ought jolly well to be thankful to that silly owl of a fellow this morning. He made me think of something I ought to have said before. I'd taken it for granted somehow. No right to! No excuse! Just didn't think. Jill, my little girl, will you marry me and that. You



## Sweet Pepper

will, won't you. God knows what I was thinking about, not to ask you before."

Jill snuggled closer to him, trying to shut out the world of questions and the future. She would not, would not be dragged back to it! She would float on for ever, wrapt in the dark forgetfulness of love.

"You will have me, little girl, won't you?"

Jill pressed closer still to him. She shivered a little.

What was the matter? he wondered. Had he been too rough? He had been so sure she loved him. One could not make a mistake about that. Why . . . ?

"You want to, don't you, Jill darling? Don't you?"

Did she want to? God, how she wanted to. By comparison she had never wanted anything before. Did she want to! But she must not, must not! That had been the condition when she had done that dreadful thing. She could never marry. She had not thought it mattered then. She could not go back on that resolve. She could not tell him why not: that she could not do. Never. Deep down in her mind she had been dreading that this would happen, but she had stifled the dread. He might not have wanted to marry her. It would have been ridiculous to think that just because he had kissed her and told her he loved her and . . . but deep down in her inner consciousness the dread had never died. She had not killed it, only put it aside. And now she must say something: she could not set the decision aside any longer: she could not funk any more, this disastrous habit of hers. She had put off going back to London, put off making a decision as to what she must do about Harry.

"Don't you want to marry me, little one?" His voice was tense and anxious.

What was she to say? What could she do? she could not tell him the truth. Ever!

He raised himself a little on his elbow, so that he could look down upon her as she lay there, her face half hidden in his coat. What was the matter? Surely . . . a fear woke suddenly in him. My God!

"Don't you want to? Don't you love me really?"

## The Easy Answer

There was no mistaking the anxiety in his voice now. What was she to do? She wished she could die, cease for ever, now, like this, in his arms.

"Don't you love me?" He was bending close over her now. He had begun to doubt her love: he was horribly scared. It was terrible for her: for him. She could not let him suffer. She ought to tell him. No, that would be worse. What would be the good? He would suffer worse, incredibly worse. She must invent some reason. Quick! Quick! What was she to do? What was she to do?

She began to sob softly, silently, against his side. He could not hear, but he could feel her sobs. What did it mean? He was thinking only of himself now. His whole happiness was at stake. He bent closer, so that he touched her hair.

"Don't you love me?" His voice was dry with pain. "Don't you love me?"

"Harry, Harry," she began to cry. For a while she lay abandoning herself to the comfort of tears. Oh, God, let her forget: let her fade away now.

"Don't you love me?" There was a quiver in the tone.

"Yes," she moaned softly.

He raised her head in his arms. If he held her like that she could not help it. She could not! It was no use trying!

"Why don't you want to marry me? Don't you want to? Don't you?"

She turned her face from him in a last effort of resistance.

"Don't you?"

"Harry, Harry, darling. Yes. I . . . I . . ."

She broke down utterly. It was all over now. She wasn't any good. She had not the pluck. Oh, God help her, and he was kissing her lips, melting all her resolutions. She struggled on for a little while longer, before she returned his kisses. She was worn out: all was lost. She had passed into a numb happiness.

## CHAPTER XVII

### Jill Wavers

**S**HE was going to be married ! She was going to be married ! All day long the thought was in Jill's mind.

That morning Harry had given her the engagement ring. They had scoured every jeweller in the Vaczi Utca and the Gazella Ter and had finally chosen at Bachkruch a hoop of rubies. Jill had never worn a ring before, and she could feel it on her finger whenever she moved her hand.

Harry was in high spirits. At lunch he began to talk about plans for the future.

"I dunno what you'll think to our old house," he said. I've told you mostly the crabs of it. It's so infernally damp in winter and it's so lonely. But in summer it's an ideal place, if one likes mucking about on water and that."

"I haven't had much to do with the sea," Jill told him, "But I like anything out of doors. I'm sure I should love it."

"The garden's a bit hopeless you know : at least round the house it is, but the kitchen garden is walled. If you cleared out the vegetables and made it into a flower garden it would be a jolly place. Then in winter one needn't be there. Indeed, I'd sooner not, I prefer to get a bit of hunting in the Midlands. I could always run down home for the wild fowling, if the weather was hard. We could go to the South in the spring for a bit each year and then back in April, just when the bulbs were coming out. Of course, if you couldn't stand it, we could move elsewhere."

To Jill it sounded like the future of a princess in a fairy story. She had not deserved it. But she would in the future : she would make Harry a perfect wife : she would

## Jill Wavers

consider him always : would mould herself to his mode of life : would make his interests her own. She would not spoil him : that would make him soft and self-centred. She would spur him on to do things and yet let him believe he had thought of the ideas himself. She would really make him a better wife than she would have done if she had met him six months before. She knew more what to do and what to avoid. She would understand his moods : she would be less selfish.

It would have been mad to have told him about herself. The idea could only have been a sop to her conscience. Did one tell sick people how ill they were ? Did women tell their husbands of the other men who had kissed them ?

Had the girls at the War Office told their husbands about those week-end motor trips ? Yet they had not been bad sorts, or even particularly wicked, only silly. No ! women only told men as much as it would make them happy to know. It was not the women's faults. Men were so odd : they thought or pretended to think a girl ought to have been waiting all her life on the chance of . . . women were fairer than that : a woman did not say thank you for a man who had never had an *a aire* before. Could there be any use in her telling Harry ? No, none ! None ! A woman could not tell !

And the harm ! Would it do any harm ? Infinite harm ! Harm to both of them ! For Harry it would be the most horrible blow, just when he had begun to recover from those years in Germany, just when he had begun to have faith in life again. He would go off somewhere, to some God-forsaken climate and live like a hermit : get more and more solitary ; an awful life. He might even take to drink, or go to the bad. There was no telling how he would take it. •

And for herself : it would mean the end of everything for her. She could never be happy now, if she lost Harry. Life had seemed difficult enough before, but at least she had not known how wonderful it could be. She would sooner be infinitely poor with him, miserably poor, tramps on the road : anything as long as she had him with her.

## Sweet Pepper

She would sooner have that than be rich without him : a thousand times : a million times. Harry would always be . . . she could fancy him looking splendid, even in rags. If a man had a good figure and walked . . . she dreamed on.

Of course there was a chance that he might marry her, even if she did tell him. But it would take all the joy out of life for him : he would always be thinking . . . Oh, God ! She would not be able to bear the look in his eyes : he would not reproach her perhaps . . . but the knowledge would be there, always : even when she was in his arms, most then perhaps, a barrier between them . . . a . . . It would ruin both their lives if she told him. It would be as if . . . no, she had no right to tell him.

There was no sense in worrying about it now : it was decided, settled. She had been marvellously lucky. If she wanted to make amends, she must do it by being a perfect wife. It sounded so easy, because it was what she wanted to do, but it would not be, not always : there would be times, there must be . . . it would really be more difficult to carry out properly what she had undertaken and to keep on doing it, than it would be to tell him.

It was settled. She must not think about it any more.

She must write and tell Kitty and her mother and Glory. Glory would be glad to hear it : Glory had been very good to her. To Kitty she must write at once. Kitty would be so happy to hear the news : Kitty was such a darling. Her mother could wait till another time, but Kitty could not. She must write to her at once : she ought to start the letter now. It need not be a long one, only just to tell her bare facts.

She got out paper and ink, and sat down at the table. How should she start ? She dated the letter and began.

"Kitty, my darling." What did she want to say ? Would it be better to . . . ? But it was settled. Why not write now ? Why not ? She could find no answer to the question, but she did not start to write. She had decided, hadn't she ? Of course she had. It was all settled . . . long ago ! It was silly . . . and yet perhaps . . . perhaps.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Worldly Wisdom

JILL was restless : even Harry had noticed it. At dinner she had been so distrait that he had asked her what was the matter. Now that she was alone in her bedroom, she did not want to go to bed : she could settle down to nothing. She tried reading : she tried sewing. She ought to be writing to Kitty : she ought to have written to her two days ago.

She went over to the writing-table, but she did not sit down. She ought to tell Kitty she was engaged. Why hadn't she ? Why hadn't she ? There was no reason to delay : it was settled. There was no good in going over all that again. She wished there was some one whose advice she could ask : or perhaps rather in whom she could confide.

If only Kitty were . . . She stood very still, her hand on her hip, gazing straight before her. Kitty ! She could not confide in Kitty. No not now. A week ago she might have, but not now. Kitty would have been horribly, horribly distressed, if she had told her about Count Arkozi and Prince Palugay, but still Jill might have told her. If she had been wretched enough, Kitty would have forgiven her, or might have. Oh, yes ! She could fancy Kitty standing by her side now : she could fancy Kitty's arm round her shoulder, Kitty's dark hair against her own, the soft, deep, caressing voice. Dear Kitty !

She could have told Kitty then : but not now. She shivered. Kitty would never condone her not telling Harry : Kitty would not understand or see how much better it was, even for him. . . . It would not be any good explaining to her : no good at all. At the end of it

## Sweet Pepper

all Kitty would be just where she had started. "You ought to tell him, you ought to tell him." It wasn't sensible. It would not be kind to Harry. But that would be Kitty's view. One could not escape from it. No, she could never tell Kitty: it did not matter . . . after all it was her own affair, to settle with her own conscience and she had settled it. It wasn't any manner of good keeping on like this.

Now Glory would understand. Glory would not support what she had done. She was not like Kitty, of course, but she was very comforting: she could be awfully kind, a dear, when she liked: and she was so cheerful. She would be better even than Kitty, just now. Glory would cheer her up and make her forget herself: forget all these silly doubts. Glory was so practical: she always saw the best side of everything. Glory would see harm in what she had done, but not considering how she had been placed. Glory had never been very definite about the details of her own life, but she must have been through some pretty queer times herself.

Somehow, people who had done wicked things, were often kinder than the ones who had always been good. Old Csaradah was a wicked old thing, but he could be very kind and sympathetic. Good people had not had enough experience to have made them understanding. Poor old Csaradah! He had been very kind sometimes. One day, when she had been very down in her luck, ashamed of herself and her position, he talked to her from tea time till dinner, and missed his favourite bridge hour at the Nemzeti Casino.

He had had such a lot to do with women that he knew, how unfair the world was to them. How odd to think now they had been discussing the very dilemma in which she found herself at present.

"Men aren't fair or logical to women," he had said. "It isn't any good pretending they're going to be. Yet they don't mind marrying a widow, even if they know she's knocked about a bit since her husband died. But they insist on a girl, if they marry her, being a virgin.

## Worldly Wisdom

They never forgive it if she isn't. Yet they don't mind very much if a widow's had three or four admirers, as long as she hasn't been too blatant about it. No one misses a slice off a cut cake. They know a widow couldn't be what they expect a girl to be, so they don't much care what she's done. It's bad luck on a girl, but there it is. If she's not a fool, she won't tell a man whom she wants to marry afterwards."

There they were Csaradah and Glory, both on her side and Kitty on the other. No, good people did not understand. It was no good thinking about what Kitty would advise. It was all settled. Perhaps, theoretically she ought to have told . . . but she had not. Yet mingled with the rights and wrongs of the matter there lurked a tinge of fear.

It was silly : there was nothing to worry about. Yet suppose Harry should find out : perhaps some one would tell him. Lots of people must have known about her and Prince Palugay. She had not been friends with any of the English in Budapest, though a good many of them must know her by sight.

No, there was nothing to be feared. The more she thought about it, the more she realized this, and that she had nothing to worry about except the moral question : and of that she had already disposed. Nevertheless this fear did disturb her, and it tried to call her conscience to its help. Perhaps the finest of our emotions are not always unmingled.



## CHAPTER XIX

### A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

NEXT night Jill asked Harry to take her to a music-hall. She had woken with a feeling of depression and this had been increased by the atmosphere of suppressed uneasiness, that had hung over the city.

The news from the Supreme Council in Paris was worse : harsher and harsher terms were to be forced on Hungary. All day small processions formed and marched about the streets. The black flags of national mourning had drooped from many windows. Some of the shops in the Vaczi Utca had had their shutters up all day, and, as if in sympathy, the sky itself had been grey and overcast.

The future of the country seemed darker than ever. The better elements in the capital had almost lost hope : the worst were muttering. If Warsaw fell to the already victorious Bolshevik Armies, they would attempt a *coup d'état*. Under such conditions no Government could long hold public confidence : they passed like phantoms. Only the masterly hand of Horthy held the state together, and with it what of civilization the Peace Conference had left in Central Europe.

Harry and Jill bought a *Daily Herald* and *The New York Herald*, because they had to read such papers as drifted out to Budapest. In these, and especially in the labour papers, the attacks on Hungary had become more bitter each day. The Socialist-Communist conference at Amsterdam had proclaimed a blockade of the country and already her half-Bolshevik neighbours, Austria and Czecho-Slovakia had already closed their frontiers to her.

Jill and even Harry could not help being a little affected by the gloom of all those about them. She had hoped that

## A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

an evening at the Orpheun would cheer her, but she was destined to be disappointed.

The first half of the programme was of the usual sort, and there was a sketch in which the Necker Baby sang and danced very charmingly. Harry, who had never had any admiration for her looks, was converted. Dinner was served to them in their box, for dinner during the performance is one of the features of the Orpheun. Jill was glad of the wine, which raised her spirits, and she drank several glasses.

Towards midnight, in deference to the political situation, there were alterations in the programme, and national songs were sung and speeches made from the stage. Neither Jill nor Harry could understand a word of what they said, but it was obvious that the speeches were patriotic. The temper of the audience began to change: Jill was conscious of it. When the lights were lowered some pictures were thrown on the screen, scenes from Hungarian history: Buda in the dark ages, when it had been the capital of Attila's great empire, the coming of the Magyars before even the Normans came to England: the great king Istvan (St. Stephen): Magyar warriors setting out to the crusades: the centuries of warfare against the Turks and the final victory of Budapest: the convention of Pressburg, with the Hungarian nobles swearing to fight to the death for Maria Teresa, when all her other subjects had abandoned her: and lastly incidents of the late war, the battles of the Caucasus and the victorious Magyar Armies marching into Belgrade and Bucharest.

Then were shown views of the cities, Hungarian for a thousand years, now to be taken from her by the Peace Treaty: and while this was done a man at one side of the stage sang songs, apparently about each town. As the audience saw the pictures of these cities to be shorn from their country indignation increased. Jill could hear the low murmurs. The views of the cities to be surrendered to their old ally Austria, and the traitorous Tschekh, excited the greatest anger. She could feel the people stirring in their seats.

## Sweet Pepper

After a while the audience began to join in some of the melancholy chants. At the end of each verse there was silence. Then in the darkness the shadowed figure on the stage asked some oratorical question, "Shall such things be," Jill imagined it might be.

"Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shāwhäh," shouted the audience.

Normally Jill was not specially emotional, but neither is a Hungarian crowd. To-night she was nervous and restless, and what would stir these people would stir her. When they shouted deep and in unison their voices were like the booming of the sea.

"Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shāwhäh. . . . Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shāwhäh."

Jill took Harry's hand and held it. She did not want to let the general emotion get mastery over her. She could feel it in her throat, in her quickened pulse.

"They're shouting No ! No ! Never !" she whispered to him, to make a diversion.

There it was again : "Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shāwhäh : " like ordered thunder, like footfalls of something immense, fatal. It was like the processions she had watched with Count Arkozi. That day had taken him, and she was frightened, vaguely, but instinctively, of this crowd instinct. If once it got one, one was powerless : it could do anything with one : anything might happen : it was a dreadful power. In Virginia it lynches a nigger : in Wales mauls a referee : in Germany it forms fours and marches, a human river of resolution.

There it was again : "Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shāwhäh" : growing : irresistible : it was creeping round her : it would surround her, cut her off.

"Harry, darling, Harry, let's be going," she whispered.

"Wait a bit," he said. "Extraordinary to watch this. I don't want to miss . . ."

Oh, God, how she wanted to be outside, away from the power of it. It would get hold of her soon : it might do anything with her, with them. She clenched her hands. It was stupid : stupid. She was not Hungarian : she did

## A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

not even understand what was happening ; only it was dreadful.

There it was. " Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Shāwhäh ! "

Harry would only think her a fool. She was a fool : she must be : must . . . she wanted to stop her ears, so that she could not hear, so as to keep out those ordered chants, that seemed to rock the shadowed walls. In the dark it was worse than it had been by naked daylight.

She slipped her arm through Harry's and tried to think of other things . . . but it would not let her. It echoed all round her, from the sides of the box. The theatre was full of sound : there was not room for it. There was something indescribably awful in the disciplined emotion of the crowd. Disjointed cries would not have mattered : they would have cancelled each other. But the common will and the common voice of humanity ! One could not escape from it !

" Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Shāwhäh ! "

She must get away or . . . . She was beginning to echo the cry in her brain, to murmur it under her breath. She must get away quickly . . . or . . . she would begin to cry. She struggled on, but the purpose of the crowd was entering her. She was slipping away. Her grasp on Harry's arm relaxed. She had forgotten that he was at her side, forgotten him, herself, everything.

The rare aspirations of humanity had claimed her. They were standing up now at the back of the house, and shouting as before.

" Nēmm . . . Nēmm . . . Shāwhäh ! "

One must do something . . . something fine. Self did not matter : nothing mattered : only the purpose that held one : to be part of the great splendid purpose, that groped through the ages, waking sometimes to magnificent effort. One must be part of it : go forward with it. One might be destroyed : it did not matter : did not matter. One was only a link. A voice had said it once, a link between the past and the future. One only existed to accomplish : to be fine : fine always. One had shed pettiness, fear, self. One could never go back to them.

## Sweet Pepper

One must go forward always to the Future, to the Glory of it.

It was over and there she was, on her feet, gripping the balcony of the box with both her hands and swaying. She did not know that she had risen from her chair. Harry was holding up her cloak to her : she saw him through a mist. He looked paler, she thought. Her skin was cold, but inside she was on fire. The lights had been out, but now they were on again. The screen on the stage was blank, already the audience had begun to shuffle out of the hall.

They were jostling their way out into the street. When they reached it they set out for the hotel. Jill clung to Harry. Her eyes were shining. The night air caught in her throat. She hoped Harry would not notice she was trembling. The audience was still about them, a cab passed and Harry hailed it. Jill gulped down something to speak.

"Do let's walk," she said. She must have time to collect herself. If they got home too soon, she did not know what she would do.

"Come on, old girl," he said. "You're a bit done up," and thrust her into the cab. She leaned against him, with parted lips and unseeing eyes. Her mind was full of confused clamour. Neither spoke.

They were at the hotel now and Harry hurried her through the hall and into the lift. Outside the door of her room they stopped. Harry's hand was still on her arm. As if from some distant world she heard his voice.

"You'd better go to bed, little girl, hadn't you?"

She had got to do it now : there was no escape.

"Come inside, Harry," she said. "I've got something I must tell you."

"Tell me to-morrow, darling : it will wait. You're done up. You'd much better go straight to bed."

"I've got to tell you now, Harry. Now. Do you hear?" How strange her voice sounded to herself.

"You've got to hear now. It can't wait."

She opened the door and drew him into the room.

## CHAPTER XX

### Towards Morning

**I**N her bedroom only the small shaded lamp by the bed was lit, but a faint luminance came from the French windows, which were wide open. Jill went out on the balcony and stood for a time motionless, looking out into the gloom. Below her the river flowed darkly. The Szechenyi Bridge hung, festooned across the night: beyond, Buda was a dumb mass against the sky.

In the high heavens a few stars watched her. They had been there always, she thought. They had seen everything ever since the beginning. They must know what she had got to do. Yet they did not care. They knew the values of everything: they had known the values of everything . . . always . . . millions of years before she was born. They knew it did not matter what happened to her. There was something terrifying in their mute indifference. She did not matter: she was only a link: no, not even a link in a chain, only a mesh, one of a million others, that made up the net of time, the net in which our illusions glittered.

Harry was somewhere in the room behind her. He did not know yet. If she did not tell him, he never would. If she did not tell him, they would go on being happy: and it would hurt no one: it would not matter: nothing did, really, nothing. They would be happy, and then in a little while they would be dead: then it would not have mattered whether she had told him or not. All she had ever wanted was to be happy. And now she had got happiness she was going to throw it away: she was going to wreck everything. Why? Why? And from some-

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where far away the voices of the Awakening Hungarians floated up to her.

"Nëmm . . . Nëmra . . . Shăwhăh !"

That was why she had got to tell. There it was, through the ages. She could not fight against it. It was going to use her. It wasn't any good : she had got to do it. That's what one always had to do : one had to struggle on, stretching out, trying to catch at it. At what ?

In a minute or two she was going to tell him and shatter everything. Everything would be wrecked, ruined : but that could not be helped. Happiness did not matter : not finally. It was what one did that mattered, not the consequence to oneself. Or to him.

She would turn round soon and face what she had to do : yet if only she could shut out the impulse, she could go now and cry in Harry's arms and be comforted and presently forget. It would be so easy. And yet . . . and yet . . . oh, she could not do it. Oh, how she wanted the soft insistence of his lips on hers to-night : but she could not do it.

The night air was soft : the shadows were kindly. Such a still spring night was made for love. She had only to turn and go to his arms. She could make him happy, she knew she could. Yet she was not going to do it. No, she was going to let this will-o'-the-wisp, flitting from nowhere to nowhere, ruin everything. This . . . this . . . filmy idea . . . this . . . this nothing. She might have been happy, like thousands of other girls : might still be. The moment was bitter, very very bitter.

If only she had fled out of the Orpheun, when they started singing. She had been conscious of the danger . . . vaguely. She had felt the power of that force before. Now it had got her : it was going to use her and afterwards it would throw her away.

She looked out into the night. If only one could escape. How ? Was there any way ? The river was down there. Perhaps that was not escape either. There might be giddy distances. . . . She must turn round soon : she

## Towards Morning

could not delay much longer. She took a long breath of the cool night air. It was like saying good-bye to life, like taking a last look at the world, the sky, the pitiless stars, the Duna flowing past, remorseless as destiny.

"Harry," she called very softly, and without turning her head. He was by her side now.

"Kiss me, darling," she said. She closed her eyes. For a while she lay in his arms, his hand was over her heart. How she loved him! God, how she loved him! It was like kissing good-bye before one went out to die.

It was all over now.

"You're done up to-night, little girl," he was saying. How big and strong he seemed . . . and what a child compared to herself.

"Come inside now," she answered. It was all over, quite over. She stepped quickly back into the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I've got something dreadful to tell you," Jill said.

He was smiling at her with his eyebrows raised a little : he was not taking her seriously : he was thinking that she was tired and over-excited. For a moment she stood still, irresolute, watching him, wondering how to begin.

"It will take some time to explain, Harry. You'd better sit down.

That was just what she had said to Tibor the first night. . . . How one's actions taunt one ! And she had thought she was desperate then.

He settled himself reluctantly in the *bergère* at the foot of her bed, his elbows on the arms of it and his hands folded. He is trying to humour me, she thought, and sat down quickly on a stool. A glass-topped table separated them. Bending over it, her chin on her hands, she saw Harry in profile. He was looking at his shoes with an air of assumed patience. He must treat her seriously ! He must be made to understand !

"Harry, it's something . . . Harry, darling, it's dreadful, really dreadful.

He was staring straight in front of him now at the



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brushes on the dressing-table. It was no use beating about the bush.

"Harry, listen. Harry, I'm not what you thought. I'm . . . a harlot," she said.

He did not move. Not even the tremble of an eyelash to show that he had heard. She had been watching his mouth, not a muscle had tightened. But he had heard, for he had been waiting for her to speak.

"Harry."

Still no response.

"Harry, darling."

"Well, what do you want me to say," he answered at last in weary tones and without looking up. "We're none of us perfect, but . . . I know it's the fashion, of course, nowadays to make oneself out . . . to say things like that. But if you. . . ."

He was still trying to humour her. She had told him as bluntly as possible, so as to make him understand: and yet he would not believe her. She would. . . . He had thought she was speaking figuratively: had not liked the word: had thought it . . . just the modern way of saying things. Oh, God! She had told him and even now he had refused to understand. Why! if she were to invent some little . . . anything . . . he would have been satisfied and she would have done all she . . . but it wasn't any use. She had got to go on with it. She reached across the table and touched his wrist with her fingers.

"Harry, listen—listen. I've tried. Harry, darling, . . . you don't see. It's true: what I said. I'm not what you thought, not a . . . no, only a harlot. I shouldn't be telling you things like this, if it wasn't true; if I hadn't got to. Harry, I've been kept, kept. Do you understand that? Two different men."

He turned quickly round, but now she could not face him and bent her head. The glass top of the table glittered beneath her eyes. She held her breath: her hand loosened its grip on his wrist without her willing it, and fell limply.

Silence. . . . Not a sound except the deep gasp, when

## Towards Morning

she took breath again. She had done it now. Her head sunk slowly on to her arm and with closed eyes she waited.

It didn't matter what happened now. He would say something : she did not really care what. It had been on the balcony that she had suffered : now her feelings had grown numb. She had done it, and in a way it was a relief.

Presently Harry got up and began pacing the room with long, slow steps. The space between her and the dressing-table was so small, that once he touched her as he passed.

"Look here," he said after a long time, and then was silent again. No one could have told from his voice how he was taking it. Jill was not thinking now. She was tired : that was all. It had been a rotten game . . . now it was over, and she wanted to rest. Minutes elapsed before he spoke again.

"But I say. It couldn't be . . . why, old Hawkins told me himself . . . knew your aunt and that . . . and . . . Jill, old girl. Look at me. I say, it isn't true, is it ?"

He was standing still by her side now, pleading with her to lie.

"It's true, Harry," she whispered, without movement.

Again there was silence. He recommenced his pacing. She did not care now. It was as if it had all happened in a past life, or in some story. They had loved and now they were dead : dead now : only later, she would have to go on living. One could not just will oneself out of existence.

He was standing by the window now she knew.

"Why did you tell me ?" he asked, after a long pause.

She sat up and leant back against the foot of the bed.

"Harry !"

"Yes, I suppose so . . . still . . ."

She turned towards him. He was looking out of the window into the night. Why didn't he go ? It was over, wasn't it ? There wasn't any good going on like this now. She had been straight with him. She might have . . . lots would have. She had tried. . . . Her thoughts became clearer.

## Sweet Pepper

"Harry, it wasn't like you think. I couldn't help it," she moaned.

"Who were they?" he asked without looking round. What did it matter? It was all over now.

"Were they anyone I know?"

She shook her head and suddenly began to cry. It was worse, oh worse! If he had stormed or cursed her . . . but asking these questions . . . oh!

"I couldn't help it," she wailed. "Harry, Harry, Harry. I couldn't. I didn't want to . . . to . . . oh . . ."

"Poor little thing, poor Jill," he said. "Poor old Jill."

He laid a hand on her bare shoulder. She started, for she had not heard him moving towards her. She cried on softly, hopelessly.

"Poor Jill!"

"I couldn't help it. I didn't know. You see, I'd never loved anyone and I didn't think I ever should. If I'd . . . oh, Harry, Harry. And I've loved you, oh, I've loved you. Long before you spoke: ever since the beginning, I think. Oh! and . . . oh!"

"When did it happen?" he asked quickly.

"Here, Harry. All since I left Vienna: only just before . . . I came down here, because . . . but I told you about that. Then everything was getting worse at home. Kitty had got chucked. . . ."

"Oh, oh, oh," she sobbed chokingly.

"Go on."

"It was somebody I met on the steamer coming down here, a Hungarian: they were both Hungarian. That didn't make it seem so. . . ."

She stopped because he had taken his hand from her shoulder. Presently he sat down in the chair in which he had been before.

"I met that American woman, too, on the steamer. I told you about her. She was here for some time. Then she went and I was all alone. I knew about home and about Kitty then. There was a great chance for us, if only . . . I told you a little about the farm, didn't I?"

## Towards Morning

Then I hadn't the pluck to go back. It was just like it was in Vienna : I put off and put off : and it got worse and worse, instead of easier. Then I met him again, the man on the steamer. I'd only seen him that day, but before Glory went, we met him again and he was nice and took us about. Tibor he was called, Count Tibor Arkozi. He'd been at Oxford. I liked him. I had to get six hundred pounds by the Autumn. If I didn't I'd got nothing before me. I hadn't really. You can't understand. I couldn't face going back to London, not knowing how I should be able to get work. The more I thought, the worse it seemed. It was like a nightmare, only always. I dreamt of it at night, and thought of it all day time. Oh, Harry, you can't understand. Then a chance came : there was the farm, and Kitty and I could get it if we could find six hundred pounds. That meant our future, everything. Then one awful day the idea came to me : I couldn't shake it off : and in the end I fell. Tibor was very nice about it. I did like him too."

Harry nodded dejectedly. It was by the twist of his lips that she knew of what he was thinking.

"No, Harry. I swear, oh, I swear I didn't love him : or Miklos, the other, Prince Palugay. No one : never : never : never at all : never. I'd tell you if I had."

She was sitting up now, leaning across the table towards him. He must not think that : that she could not bear : that would be too much.

"Harry, darling, listen to me. I've told you the truth. It's cost me more than . . . but you can guess that. Then why should I lie to you about other things ? Tell me ! But there hasn't been : there's never been anyone except you. That was why I never knew . . . till you came. I'd die for you. I know, I know : every one says that, but I would. I'm a coward : that's why I did. . . . But I'd die for you all the same. Listen ! They weren't anything to me : they didn't mean anything to me. Tibor was awfully good to me. I liked him and admired him, but I never, never, never. And as for Miklos : he wasn't bad really, only weak and selfish. He . . . oh, Harry,

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listen. I swear, by God, I swear to you, I never cared for anyone except you : not even thought I did. I didn't pretend to ; never, not with anyone, not even when . . ."

She checked herself. He was sitting there, very still, with hands clasped on his knee, looking straight in front of him. His lips were set : his eyes almost closed. She knew he was suffering, but he would not whine or bully, or . . . not Harry ! He started, and for a little while she thought he would speak : but he did not.

"It wasn't as if I gave them . . ." she continued. "I didn't : I swear I didn't : not myself, not really, only my body. Oh, Harry, don't look at me like that, don't : I can't bear it. I've been through so much, before I made up my mind to tell you. I can't bear it if you do. . . . It sounds horrible giving one's body. I know : I know."

Harry started again.

"It was, too, cugh !" she went on grimly. "You don't suppose . . . but you know how I was brought up. I was utterly desperate, utterly. Do you know how that feels ? Yes ? If it had come all of a blow, being poor and having no work, I mean : if it had happened all together, then I'd have been able to manage. But it didn't : it grew worse, slowly, but all the time. It was like water rising round one inch by inch. I'm quite brave if . . . but what does that matter."

Again they sat in silence, till Harry turned to her.

"Who else knows ?" he asked. He was looking towards her, but past her. The pupils of his eyes had grown very small.

"Who knew ? About Tibor no one, no one except Major Zonay. About Miklos, lots : that made it worse. He wasn't . . . he didn't care."

She stopped. How miserable she was now. She had fancied before that she had been wretched, but she had not known. Harry was looking beyond her, out into the night or, as she had done, at the river, perhaps. The silence lasted until he rose and went over to the window again. Then she continued, as if excusing herself to the empty chair he had left.

## Towards Morning

"Not the English or? . . . I don't think they knew. That sailor who spoke to you. . . . If you knew how that terrified me. But I don't suppose he really knew. You see I didn't know them, or anyone they knew. Not that it matters now. . . . People may have suspected, but I don't suppose anyone could really have known, except the "Musketeers": those were his friends, and they'd never tell. They weren't like that: they'd be loyal in any case. Oh, one could trust them always."

Outside a breeze was rising. It stirred the muslin blind and pressed against his shoulder. Jill caught the sound of ripples, lapping against the quays.

"Oh, Harry, if you'd believe. Oh, if I'd known I could love. If I'd guessed about you. As it was I didn't really give anything. I didn't."

He turned to her, moved perhaps by some flickering hope.

"Not myself, my real self, I mean . . . only . . . only my body. It isn't . . . oh, you know, you know . . . it was only . . . one can't explain. One's real self is inside. No one can make one give that. I kept that clean. I swear . . . oh, don't look at me like that: don't for God's sake."

Her lip was weakening. There were tears on her cheeks again.

"Don't look at me like that, Harry. You did love me, you did, didn't you? I've got that to remember."

He passed her again and leant against the dressing-table.

"Yes, I love you," he said. "That's just it. I didn't think I'd ever care for anyone. That time in Germany had knocked me out pretty badly. Afterwards I couldn't shake it off. I'd given up even trying to be happy. It isn't exactly a jolly state, being like that. Then I met you and I saw it was worth while again. And I was just . . . I felt yesterday there was something wrong. I wish . . . you see, I'd just got on my feet again and now. . . ."

He was looking at her. He still loved her: still. That didn't matter now: yet . . . oh, it was something to carry

## Sweet Pepper

away with her. She leaned forward, suddenly eager.

"Harry, are you sorry I told you?"

He showed no sign of having heard.

"Harry, listen to me. You can't marry me. . . no, I know . . . I know . . . naturally . . . but . . ."

He was pacing the room again.

"Harry, couldn't you take me as I am . . . oh, I wouldn't ask you to stick to me, or expect anything of you. I wouldn't mind how you treated me, I wouldn't: no, I wouldn't. I shouldn't mind your despising me. Oh, Harry, can't you. I do so want a little happiness . . . just a little, a week or a month . . . I wouldn't ever be happy after. I don't want to go on living even, but . . . I'd like to have been happy, just for a week of my life: something to remember, to remember you by. Harry, oh, my Harry!"

He had stopped by the window again and was looking out into the gloom.

"Can't you? Can't you?"

"And be the third," he muttered scarcely above his breath.

"Harry!" She began to cry again.

"I'm sorry," he added quickly. "It . . . I'm sorry . . . forgive me. It was a caddish thing to say. I'm sorry."

He passed her again.

"I was a beast. I'm sorry, old girl," he said and stroked her wrist. "Now, now . . ."

She looked up. He was by her side gazing down at her. His eyes had softened. If she threw herself on her knees and caught his hands, she would win him yet. If she let herself slip to the floor and cried at his feet. Now was the moment. He was melting. It was now or never. But she could not . . . not now . . . yesterday she could have, but not now. If he forgave her, yes, but she could not beg him to. Lots of women would. The ones who made scenes always got what they wanted. She envied them, how she envied them. But she could not do it: not to save her happiness: not to save her soul.

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The room was quiet again. Harry's hand rested on the table. He clenched and opened it. Such a fine strong hand! If only she were to take it now and kiss it and beg. . . . But she remained motionless. How she loved him: how she loved him.

Time passed.

"Harry, Harry, listen! I'd make you happy. I would. I know I don't deserve you: I know, I know. But you want to be happy, you do, don't you? You said you were wretched till you met me. Are you going to be happier now? Are you?"

Oh, it was mean to say all this, because she was not really thinking of him most, but of herself and how she could not live without him: that was it. Mean, oh yes, but it was now or never. If she failed now or did nothing, then she would lose everything that was fine and beautiful in life. It was now, in the next hour or two, that she had to fight for her chance in life. She had been a fool, been wicked, but she had just this chance left, half an hour in which to win her salvation. It could be done: it could be done. It was true, too: he would be happier with her . . . oh, yes, he would. And she . . . oh, to her it was everything. It was only tradition or inherent jealousy, or convention, against which she had to fight: something dull and heavy, a dead weight. But she was alive, and oh, how she wanted to be happy. She must batter it down. Harry was sitting there, not thinking about anything, only suffering, like she had been a little while before. She must drag him away from the contemplation of his misery: make him face facts: make him understand what he would lose.

"Harry, why can't you?"

He did not move, only watched the brushes on the dressing-table. She must wake him, wake him, make him think.

"Darling, look at me! Look at me!" she whispered hoarsely.

He turned slowly to her the same lack-lustre listless glance with which he had been regarding the dressing-table.



## Sweet Pepper

"Harry, you love me. I love you. It would be mad, mad, mad to part like this. Oh, Harry, don't you see it? I'm not asking you to marry me, only to take me till you're tired of me. Why can't you? Why? If you love me, why?"

She was begging for all that mattered to her, her life almost, and he would not even listen. She could not hold his attention. The precious time was flitting away.

"To think that if I'd come a few months ago," he said. "To think . . ." and was silent again.

"Harry, Harry, darling. I'm not asking you to marry me, no, no, no. Listen! I'm only asking you to take me till you've done with me: only what lots of men would. . . . Oh, Harry, listen, darling, listen! I know men and women are different. Women don't mind what a man's done first: if he hadn't done anything they'd rather despise him. It's different with women, I know. I expect it's right. But lots of girls have, nowadays . . . altogether or almost, with other men, I mean, and they don't tell their husbands. And widows: men don't mind marrying them, or girls who have loved some one else. Isn't it really the love that matters? That's fresh with me. I've never loved anyone but you, never, never. I swear to God I haven't. I'd love you always. I wouldn't want to see other men ever. You'd never have cause to be jealous. Isn't that something? Answer! Harry, answer me! Darling, do!"

He turned from her again and was looking down at his hands, clasped so tightly that his knuckles showed white through the skin.

"I must think," he said, more to himself than to her. "Must think . . . think . . ."

They were silent for a little, Jill panting, trying to hold back sobs. Her time was running out. She must make another appeal. If she did not he would be gone, he would fade away like some wonderful dream. She choked down her sobs and started again.

"Darling, darling. It's all done with what you've been thinking about. It's over, over, never to come back: it

## Towards Morning

can't. It never meant anything to me, not even . . . nothing except bread and butter . . . and buying the farm. What's the good of being jealous of what happened before I knew, about you or love or . . ."

It wasn't any good : she could not hold him. The past was between them like a wall. It was awful to think of. He was there at her side and he loved her, and yet she could not make him even listen to her when she was praying for their happiness. And to think that soon he would be gone, lost : awful to think of. How blind, how dreadful ! It was like pleading to the sea. . . . And yet once more she tried.

"Harry, why should an idea wreck us both. I've sinned . . . oh, I know, I must pay for it. But I've told you. You couldn't marry me now, but why shouldn't you take me . . . lightly, just for a month or two. Harry, Harry, I'd love you as no one else could ever love you. I'd never think of anything but you, or look at anyone but you. Why can't you ? You do love me."

She reached across the table and touched his arm.

"Why can't you ? Darling, darling, darling. I love you so . . . so, so, so. I couldn't ever tell you how much. Why can't you ?"

She let go his sleeve and gazed miserably out into the night.

"I must think," he said presently. "Takes thinking about . . ." She had failed : she had said everything that she could, she had pleaded, thrown away every restraint : and she had failed.

Time passed.

"What's to be done then, Harry ?" she asked presently.

He did not answer for a long while. Her opportunity was slipping away. It was a losing fight for her.

"I don't know, I don't know," he said. "I can't tell you. I must think. It's all so sudden. One doesn't have plans ready. I must think."

He rose and took up his coat and hat from the table. Was he going ? Oh, she could not bear to lose him yet.

## Sweet Pepper

But he did not go : he stood there as if undecided, looking up at the chandelier.

"Must have time, must have," he repeated and then turned suddenly on her. "I'll let you know to-morrow . . . to-morrow night, dinner time . . . good night."

She got up, and Harry bending over her kissed her lightly, so lightly that she scarcely felt his lips on hers.

For a moment or so she saw him framed in the doorway, tall, splendid, the only man she had ever loved.

Even now if she rushed and threw herself into his arms . . . but she stood her ground, her head bent, her lips parted.

He was going, perhaps for ever, going. The door had closed and she stood still, holding her breath and listening to the sound of his footsteps growing fainter and fainter.

## CHAPTER XXI

### The Steadfast Dawn

**D**ARKNESS hardened into the grey reality of a ceiling. Outside a false dawn numbed the sky. Jill, shivering, drew another blanket over her. The room looked empty and forlorn.

She was cold. How little it mattered : yet mechanically, one would go on obeying the demands of one's senses as before . . . just as if one cared !

She shut her eyes and tried not to think. What good could it do ? She was beyond hope or despair. Her brain felt worn out. She had not slept all night, though sometimes she had dozed for a little. Soon day would break : time would begin again, and one would have to go on living. There would be all day, morning, afternoon, evening, before she knew what Harry would do. They were both under the same roof now. He was not far away. How odd it seemed. Was he sleeping ? Was he lying there, wondering what to do ? Perhaps he had already made up his mind. Perhaps, like herself, he was still confused and purposeless. What would he do ? She would not know till evening. Would those hours ever pass ? They would drag on and drag on, and she would be waiting. What would he do ?

Why were men so different from women ? Women could forgive : they didn't even mind about what a man had done before he met them. She would not have minded if . . . how could it have mattered to her ? But . . . oh, it wasn't any good going over that. If he married her, would he in time . . . could he forget ? If he would not be able to forget, wouldn't it be worse than losing him now ? Wouldn't the knowledge of what

## Sweet Pepper

she had done stand between them? If it did it would drive him desperate, make him break away and leave her. Or would he realize now his incapacity to put these things behind him? Would he just go away now and leave her? Wouldn't she see him any more? Her Harry, her Harry, the only man she had ever loved. Ever would love! That would be the end of everything. She would go on being alive, of course, but she would be dead really, dead to everything except grief. And she had been so happy, so marvellously and unbelievably happy with him. Her Harry, her brave, splendid Harry: he was hers, yes, he was: he would be, always, even if she never saw him. She would go on loving him always, always, when she was quite old and thin and grey, when all the other passions of to-day would be cold and dead, always. He was hers. He had loved her. He did love her, even now. He had said so, after he knew. It wasn't as if he was the sort who could get fond of just any one: he wasn't like that. He had not really cared for any one, never, not really. Now love would be spoilt for him, life almost. Oh, the waste, the cruel waste, when they two, who loved each other, could be divided by . . . what she had done before he had come into her life, by a shadow: it was no more. He knew she had never loved any one else: he knew how she loved him.

Harry would never be able to love any one else now: no he wouldn't. If he began to care for some one, there would always be distrust. Most men would get over it: Harry wouldn't. She knew that. He had been through so much that this would embitter him for always. She had spoilt his chance of loving any one else. She had: it wasn't any good pretending she hadn't. He had loved her and believed in her. And she had betrayed his love, destroyed his faith in women. She ought to have told him sooner . . . oh, she ought . . . yes . . . yes. But when? When? She had not known: how could she have known he was going to love her? She had loved him before, oh, yes, oh, how she loved him! But she had thought no one could care for her, not really, only horribly.

## The Steadfast Dawn

She had not dared to hope that he could love her. How could she have known? She had not believed, that afternoon on the Gellert Hegy, that anything so wonderful could happen to her.

Then, that night in the beeches by the Hunyadi Tower, in the ecstasy of their first kisses: how could she have told him then? How could she? She could feel those kisses now, those delicious moments, long, dark gaps in time, when her happiness had been almost more than she could bear. How could she have told him then? And afterwards . . .? Oh, the wonder of those first kisses! Wouldn't she ever feel his kisses again, or his arm about her? Never?

She began to sob softly, and later dozed again.

\* \* \* \* \*

At lunch time she drank some soup which was brought up to her room. Afterwards she went out for a walk.

Where should she go? She did not care. It did not matter. She wandered aimlessly along the Embankment. Somewhere a clock in some convent tower clanged. It must be three o'clock. She could not know his answer for five hours, very likely not so soon. He had said, at dinner time, and often they did not dine till nine. How the minutes dragged on! Yet she was not sure that she wanted them to pass. Till the very hour, at least, she could go on hoping: there was nothing to be done.

A detachment of men, with bundles on their shoulders, passed her. She wondered idly what they were doing. Perhaps they were recruits for the army. They might be volunteers going to help the Poles along the Russian front: or they might be starting out on some "hush" errand, like those ventures of Tibor Arkozi. They might be arriving and not departing, refugees driven from their homes in the lost territories: or only something quite dull, a party from some province come to the capital to take part in the demonstration. She scanned their faces, but could judge nothing from their expressions, patient peasant faces, with here and there a glint of gaiety or

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vision. It did not matter to her what they were doing. Thinking about them killed time: that was all.

When they had passed she leaned for a time on the railings and gazed over the river to Buda. The sun was over the Gellert Hill and the fronts of the houses, frowning down from the ancient Var, were already in shadow. A tug and a string of ill-kempt barges were churning their way up-stream to the lovely Szechenyi Bridge. The two-parts red flags of the new Austrian state drooped, dirty and indifferent from their ensign poles. For a long time she watched them. They were going back to Vienna, where she had come from! When finally the bend of the river hid them, she was sorry. It must be nearly half-past three. Four and a half hours more of anxiety or of hope. She turned from the river.

What should she do? The cinemas would be open now, but she could not bear to sit still. Anything to make time pass, but not that. If she were to sit still in a picture theatre, listening to the purr of the machine and the scraping of the music, she would become hysterical. She would call out or do something. She had passed under the shoreward span of the Erzsebet Bridge. It was cold in the shade. She shivered and quickened her pace till she was in the sunshine again.

Where was Harry now? What was he doing? Had he come to a decision? Would she lose him? Would she? She gulped down a sob and set her teeth. She was not going to be a coward now: not now. She had told him. She was going to go through with it. Yet till eight she could not know his answer. Did she even want that hour to come? She was tired, so tired that for a moment, she did not want to think at all. It would be nice to sit down. She looked about for a seat, but she could not see one. Behind her in one of the little streets, that led into the Vaczi Utca, was the little cake shop where they made the delicious *mille feuilles* and *éclairs*, better even than those at Gerbaud. She could sit down there for a little. She turned round. Yes, she was very tired though she had only just become aware of it.

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It was further than she had thought to the shop. How hard the pavement was ! Just then she noticed that she was passing a church, the outside of which she knew well by sight, a staid, dignified plaster façade of the great Habsburg epoch. The door was open and she saw into the quiet interior. She could rest there.

Inside was hushed, heavy twilight, faintly scented with incense, jewelled glimmer from a stained-glass window, and in the dark aisles the tiny glitterings of candles and little lamps in the side chapels. The decorations were of the boldest baroque, now mellow and dusty, painted twisted columns, wide spaces of faded walls, relieved here and there by the heavy shadows of a cornice or a sumptuous self-sufficient scroll. The calm of a perpetual afternoon seemed to tinge the whole building. Jill let herself slip limply on a chair. Her limbs glowed : her brain seemed numb. For a time she rested, thoughtless and motionless.

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She remained so for a long while, with eyes half closed and conscious of nothing except lassitude. How quiet and peaceful it was here. Everything about her seemed to reflect her mood, the still perfumed dusk, the wide undecorated spaces, the effective considered shadows, the carved and coloured effigies of the saints and martyrs posed as if conscious of the dignity which grief or fervour gave them. They made up a rather pompous, almost Habsburg Court, about the Queen of Heaven, the High Keeper of the Keys, the Cup Bearer, the Mistress of the Robes, each with the insignia of office. Jill wondered idly who some of these saints might be.

Nothing happened here : nothing ever had happened. The youthful enthusiasms of faith had been dead long before this church had been built. Perhaps it was as much in touch with the world to-day as it had ever been. The people still came here, yet the thick walls kept out the sound of the city. Year in, year out, generation after generation, the same services had been held here : baptisms, marriages, funerals : dawn, noon, night, Matins,



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High Mass, Angelus : and between each peace. People came here, just as she had, because it was a haven from their lives, where one could escape from the present, and where one could rest for a little while in this dim ante-chamber between the past and the future.

Not far from her was a peasant woman, whose expression, except that her mouth was harder, was very like that of the Madonna, before whom she knelt. Jill watched the woman's lips moving. Sometimes she could hear the sound of her words, quick, eager. People came here to pray. Did they ever get that for which they asked ? Perhaps it would not satisfy them if they did. She had prayed for happiness and yet, when she had it she had thrown it away.

If she had not told Harry, she could have gone on being happy. She need not have told him. He couldn't have discovered. Even if he had heard anything, he would have believed her if she had denied it. No, she had been secure. Yet, though she had had the happiness for which she had prayed, she had thrown it away. Why ? Why ? Even now, she did not really know what had made her tell : not the religion she had been taught, nor those shadowy faiths that remained of it : no, nor her love for Harry, though that was the strongest emotion she had known : that would have kept her from confession. No, it hadn't been that, nor selfishness. Yet she had told him, and now she was not even sorry. Before, when she had been uncertain what she would do, she had dreaded the thought. But now the course she had taken seemed to have been inevitable. Why had it been ? Why ? She had wanted happiness so desperately : she had fought for it, bartered her future for it. Then when she had it in her grasp, she had let it escape her, deliberately.

Had it been just because she had been at that music-hall and had heard the people shouting in a language she didn't understand, and had felt about her the instinct of the crowd ? What had it mattered to her what a Hungarian mob cared for or wanted ? But she had been

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caught and swirled away by that forgetfulness of self. The spirit, that gripped those about her, had caught her, too : and she had let happiness go. Last night as she had stood on the balcony, looking out into the night, she had known that there was bigger game to hunt than that little blue bird. She had let it flutter away.

What had she really wanted ? She had wanted Harry. Oh, how she had wanted him ! But she could not let him take her like that, not unless he knew. She had paid an awful price for security and yet she had not been able to make herself offer that little dole of deceit, not for the sake of what she wanted most on earth. Had that been how her prayers had been answered ? Perhaps she hadn't prayed hard enough. Yet she had, oh, she had. How she had thanked God that night when she knew that Harry loved her. Oh, she had.

Perhaps all this was to try her. God could do anything. He could give her Harry. He could : would He ? Was there any plan in the ordering of events ? Surely she and Harry could not have been brought together just so that she should be made to realize what she had lost. That would have been a devilish way of punishing her : and Harry, he hadn't done any harm. He had been unlucky enough.

The peasant woman had shouldered her pannier and was shuffling away. Jill bent her head till her face was in her hands. It was easier now that she was alone.

" Oh, don't let him suffer any more," she prayed. " If I must be punished, punish me some other way. Don't let him suffer like that for what I've done. Oh God, be merciful ! . . . oh, I didn't mean to harm any one. I didn't know I should ever love. And I've told him. I've tried to be straight, I tried. Forgive what I did before I knew him. Let me have another chance : only one more. Let me have Harry. Oh, I will love him : I'll never do anything else : never ! And I'll be good always. I'll think of nothing but making him happy.

She prayed on eagerly, breathlessly.

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It was evening again and Jill<sup>o</sup> sat by the table in her bedroom waiting. She was in evening dress with a cloak already about her shoulders. A book lay open before her, but she had not been trying to read. Every time that any one moved in the passage outside she sat very still, listening. Was it Harry?

Would he come? What would he say? She was going to be brave: that she had determined. She would be brave. She had told him: she need not have. But as she had done so, she must go on with it. In the church that afternoon she had given way and had sobbed, as if her heart would break, but now she was calm again.

Some one bustled along the passage, but it was only the step of the waiter, she knew. She rose and went over to the open window. Daylight had faded away altogether and a chilly night breeze stirred the acacia trees. It was not an evening to sit out of doors and the Embankment below was nearly deserted. Somewhere in the distance and out of sight some demonstration must be in progress. Now and again she could hear the tramp of feet on an asphalt street, and occasionally a cry.

She turned suddenly towards the room. She had caught the sound of hurried steps in the passage. They were coming towards her room. Would they turn to the right towards the suite of the Polish Minister? There! A knock at her door! She hurried to open it. Outside was the hall porter: he handed her a note. She took it, her heart standing still. She was going to be brave.

She shut the door and came towards the table with the letter in her hand. What was in it? The cut-glass chandelier mocked her with a thousand eyes. She sat down mechanically in her chair and tore open the envelope. Inside was a letter and a smaller envelope.

She set her teeth and began to read.

“MY OWN JILL,—

“It isn't any good. I can't do it. I've thought it out, over and over again, everything. But I can't. I may seem a cad because you've been straight with me

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when I don't suppose one girl in a thousand would have. But I couldn't make you happy now I know. I shouldn't ever be able to forget. And knowing would spoil my love for you. I love you still. I always shall. I'd do anything in the world for you, but I can't marry you. If it were only to give you my name, of course I would. But I couldn't live with you. I'm not big enough to forget. I'm not saying you were wicked or that, or that I've got any grievance. It's just luck. I'm ashamed I can't bring myself to do the decent thing, but I can't. I couldn't go on with it. By the time you get this I shall have left Pest. I shall go to Vienna and throw up my job. I want to get away and try to forget, or anyhow not to think. I shall go to Warsaw again and join the Poles against the Bolsheviks, if they'll take me. In case I can ever do anything for you, Cox's will find me wherever I am. In the enclosed envelope is something which may help you out of the difficulty you mentioned. It's no good not taking it as I shall see you do . . . somehow. Don't think too hardly of me. I've loved you as I didn't know I could have loved. I love you still. I shall never be able to forget you. But forget me. Or if you can, forgive.

"HARRY."

So he was gone! Jill let the letter slip through her fingers. There was nothing to be done: nothing. It was all over, love, life, happiness. The other envelope lay on the table. She picked it up. What did it matter what was in it? She did not care, but she opened it. Inside was a sheet of notepaper with "towards the farm" and a cheque for six hundred pounds. What did it matter? She let them fall. Nothing mattered. Nothing.

Outside the tramp of feet had grown closer. She could hear the murmurs and the shouts. What did it matter? Nothing was any good now: nothing ever would be.

"Nëmm . . . Nëmm . . . Shăwhăh!" came the voice of the crowd, the chant of the Awakening Hungarians. She had lost Harry. It was finished. What did any-

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thing matter? The sound of the people without floated up to her.

"Němm . . . Němm . . . Shăwhăh!"

Nothing mattered now: yet she had got to go on living. She had lost happiness, lost hope, everything, yet she was not dead. She had got to go on! She had got to be brave. Nothing but resignation can vanquish. She threw back her head and clenched her teeth. The line of her neck was just the line Harry had seen and loved that day on the Gellert Hegy. The line that he would never be able to remember well enough, the line that he would never be able to forget. She had got to go on . . . just the same. Harry gone! Perhaps he had been right. She could not tell: she could not blame him. She loved him, loved him more than anything else in earth or heaven. She always would love him, though she would never see him again.

Yet life wasn't finished, was it? No, life wasn't finished.

And now, close below her window, they roared the answer, clear and brave:

"Němm . . . Němm . . . Shăwhăh!"

The voice of those who struggle on:

"NĚMM . . . NĚMM . . . SHAWHĚH!"

